

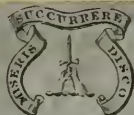


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IVAN DE BIRON

IVAN DE BIRON

*OR, THE RUSSIAN COURT IN THE MIDDLE
OF LAST CENTURY*

BY THE

AUTHOR OF "FRIENDS IN COUNCIL," ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.

W. ISBISTER & CO.

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CONTENTS OF VOLUME III.

BOOK VI.

CHAP.	PAGE
V. Marshal Münnich as an Exile—Invites de Biron to His House . . . ,	1
VI. The Conduct of the Principal Personages at the Marshal's Party	6
VII. Nariskoff's Fears—A Russian Ceremony—Nariskoff's Fears Realized	20

BOOK VII.

I. Azra Appears in a New Opera—The Empress and the Actress—Azra asks for an Audience—The Empress receives Her on the Following Day . . . ,	43
II. The Empress's Conjectures as to the Identity of Azra—Azra's Audience	53
III. Ivan, when arrested, desires his servant Kalynch to proceed at once to the Duke of Courland and Inform Him of His Fate—The Duke applies for Leave to Write to Ivan—The Letter seen by the Empress and the Governor—Kalynch allowed to be Bearer, and to be reinstated in Ivan's Service	63

A. Taylor
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CHAP.	PAGE
IV. The Rejoicings at St. Petersburg after a Victory—The Empress alone in Her Palace—Her Remorse and Sorrow at the Bloodshed occasioned by this Victory—The Duke of Courland seeks an Audience of Her Majesty	70
V. The Duke of Courland's Audience	84
VI. The Empress recalls the Serbatoffs and Ivan de Biron from Exile—Their Journey to St. Petersburg—The continued Estrangement of Marie and Ivan	97
VII. The Empress sends for Ivan—The Interview—Ivan finally reinstated in the Empress's Favour	110
VIII. The Empress's Plan for the Welfare of Ivan de Biron and the Princess Marie—The Empress sends for Nariskoff	122
IX. The Serbatoffs, Ivan, Azra, and Nariskoff are ordered to Assemble in the State Room of the Winter Palace—The Object of the Empress in thus assembling Them—Its failure	136
X. Ivan's Diary During His Exile—Extracts therefrom	152
XI. The Friendship of Nariskoff and Azra . .	163
XII. The Princess Marie and Ivan attend a Rehearsal of the Opera—The Scenes, not upon the Stage, that lead to a Happy Conclusion	174
XIII. A Summing Up of the Fate and Fortunes of the Principal Personages in the Narrative	204

BOOK VI.



CHAPTER V.

MARSHAL MÜNNICH AS AN EXILE—INVITES DE BIRON
TO HIS HOUSE.

MARSHAL MÜNNICH was the great man at Pelem ; and, as was said before, the extraordinary vivacity of this renowned General was not to be dulled by any adverse circumstances. The vigour which he had shown upon the banks of the Pruth, or in his battles with the great Seraskier, was no greater than that which he manifested in organizing and leading society in obscure little Pelem.

The General gave parties ; and, to the astonishment of the new exiles, he had resolved to

invite Ivan de Biron; a fact which was known to the gossips of the town, and was much canvassed by them, not altogether with approval. They did not see that circumstances were much altered. In the first place the General had become a very religious man; and, in accordance with that spirit, it was his duty to forgive his enemies, especially those whom he had more particularly injured. In the next, Münnich felt that he had had the better of his great enemy, the Duke of Courland. Then too, the Field Marshal had been greatly disgusted with the ingratitude, as he held it to be, of the Duchess Regent towards him. "If it had all to come over again" he would say to his familiar friends, "I almost think I would rather have stood by the Regent Duke, false as he is, than by that falser, feebler creature, the Duchess Regent. "You know, my dear," he would say, when talking to his wife of the past, "that when you women are bad, and weak, you are worse and weaker than even men are."

All these impressions might not have prevailed

with Münnich to induce him to receive and welcome any one bearing the hated name of Biron, had it not been for a circumstance apparently very slight, which yet had great effect. It is these minor motives which often make the larger ones converge to a conclusion. That new church which the Field Marshal had caused to be built, was now his favourite hobby. Ivan de Biron's voice, though somewhat uncultivated, was a very sonorous one; and the Field Marshal had been told that he would do well to secure him as a leader of the choir.

Accordingly it happened that to the first party which Münnich gave after the arrival of the Serbatoffs, Ivan was invited.

He was at first rather doubtful as to accepting the invitation; but he, too, had his little motive which was very potent with him. The Princess Marie would doubtless be there. He would like to see how she would receive him. How would that false girl now behave to him?

Nariskoff's description might be highly coloured, but still there was probably some truth

in it. Doubtless the Princess suspected that Nariskoff knew what had really happened, and wished to put herself in the right, even with him. False as they are, Ivan said to himself, they do not like that other men should know how false they are. He recollected their meeting at the Empress's first ball at St. Petersburg. He could play that part which she had then played so well. He could be the kind, gracious, patronizing friend. He was now the older inhabitant at Pelem—the one who had a right to patronize and to proffer service to the new comers.

It was with such bitter thoughts as these, in which there was a certain sweetness mingled with the bitterness, that Ivan prepared to attend the Field Marshal's party.

"I suppose," he said to himself, "Münnich has no new act of treason in his head. He cannot seize upon me as he did before, and send me further into exile."

All Ivan's previous thoughts and reasonings must have been much disturbed and controverted

by the way in which the Field Marshal did in fact receive him.

“Ah,” he said, “Ah, Biron. We had a little the better of you, my young friend, when last we had dealings with you. How is his Highness the ex-Regent? would he were here to-night, though I fear he bears me far more malice than I do him. We have both been the dupes of a woman, Baron. You see some of us are not so young as you; and even you young fellows are sometimes duped as much as the old ones are. Ha! the beautiful Marie Andréevna,” exclaimed the general, suddenly perceiving the entrance of the Princess. “It cannot be said that we poor exiles at Pelem are much to be pitied while we have the greatest beauty of Elizabeth’s court with us,—Eh! Baron. I am sure it is not for us young men to regret our exile.”

So saying, the gallant Marshal made his way to that part of the room where the Countess Münnich was receiving her guests.

BOOK VI.



CHAPTER VI.

THE CONDUCT OF THE PRINCIPAL PERSONAGES AT THE
MARSHAL'S PARTY.

It had been with very gloomy thoughts, and in a very hard and determined frame of mind, that Ivan had entered a house which had been the scene of so much misery, and yet of so much joy to him. Here it was that he had often covertly watched the Duke of Courland—longing, but unable, to soothe the wretchedness of his great fellow exile; striving, but unable, to divert his own mind from the unavailing contemplation of this wretchedness. It seemed a kind of pro-

fanation to him, that this house should now be the scene of aught that was festive. He bethought him of what his Italian mother had once told him of some grand palace—was it in Venice, Mantua, or Milan, he could not remember?—where the state rooms were over the prison, so that the prisoners dimly partook of any palatial festivities that were going on above them.

Then the joy, his own private joy, of which the rooms in that house had been witnesses—the joy of first love—when he had parted, not unwillingly from her, that in this very room he might, alone, or unheeded by his gloomy master, have more time and freedom to meditate upon her manifold perfections, than he could command in her presence.

All this was no matter now, as he said to himself, endeavouring to drive these thoughts of by-gone days away. Had he not once and for all completely planned out his life for the future? Besides, after the fashion of the young, who, when they have met with some disappointment, are wont to make out to themselves that they are

old, if not in years, at any rate in heart and mind, and even to be somewhat proud of this feeling of age, Ivan considered that he had finally concluded with all matters relating to the affections, and was henceforth to seek in intellectual employment that peace which had fled from him as an ambitious man and as a lover.

He did not deceive himself, when he told himself that he no longer loved Azra; and that, if she were now to consent to marry him, that consent would meet with a most unwilling response from him. In the course of his long and wearisome journey to Siberia, far more wearisome than it had been on the first occasion of his exile, he had reasoned much with himself respecting his love for Azra and for the nature of her character. He began for the first time to comprehend fully that she was a consummate artist, and that no other affection would dethrone from her mind her supreme love of art. This, in his eyes, was a fatal blot upon the character; and from the moment that he thoroughly recognized its existence, she was for ever lost to him.

His sentiments, as regards the Princess, were of a very different, and of a much more mixed character. Nariskoff's reports of her conversations with him, had not been without some effect upon Ivan; but an effect very different from that which Nariskoff had aimed to produce. There may be no word in the Russian language which exactly represents the word flirtation; but there is no people, however primitive, or however refined, amongst whom the idea sought to be conveyed by that word, is unknown. Ivan said very bitterly to himself, after listening to Nariskoff's adroit misrepresentations, "This girl will now, I suppose, be contented, and even pleased, to receive those attentions from me which she can no longer have from her Dukes, her Princes, or her Counts. But no woman shall deceive me twice. We have seen a good many inundations of the Neva; and know now when the ice is dangerous."

It was in this mood of mind that Ivan had entered that two-storied house, the chief one in Pelem, which was so well known to him. He

had rather feared his first introduction to the Marshal, considering all that had passed between the houses of Münnich and Biron; but the cordial reception which the veteran had given him, at once served to put Ivan at his ease in that company where there were still many persons who bore great enmity to the Duke of Courland. These, however, followed the example of their host; and Ivan was astonished to find how much he had exaggerated the difficulties which he thought he should have to overcome in entering, for the first time, the select company of exiles at Pelem.

His eyes had followed the Field Marshal's when the Princess Marie was entering the room, and had anxiously gazed at that countenance, which, despite his firm resolves of aversion, he had somewhat curiously longed to see. He was not a little shocked when he did see it, for it bore the evident marks of distress and suffering.

"I do believe," he said to himself, "that she is a good daughter, though a bad woman in other respects;" and then he added spitefully,

“besides her exile from the Court must be very bitter to such a lover of grandeur; and whom does she leave behind? Some fool like me, no doubt; unless, indeed, he is of princely origin.”

The parts which these two had now to play were entirely reversed from what they had been when they met at the Empress Elizabeth's first ball at St. Petersburg. It was the Princess who was now longing for kind recognition; it was Ivan who was studying how to make this recognition on his part purely friendly, and nothing more. With a feeling of its being desirable to get over as quickly as possible a disagreeable meeting, he lost no time in going to that part of the room where the Princess was, and addressing her. There was no deficiency of subjects to talk about, that were entirely suited to the friendly character which Ivan aimed at adopting. One exile had always much to tell, and much to listen to, when meeting another for the first time.

Ivan and Marie found that the causes of their

exile were exactly similar. The Serbatoffs and Ivan were, alike, victims of the so-called "Lapouschin conspiracy," and were, alike, innocent victims. They did not hesitate to speak in the strongest terms of condemnation to one another of the fate of the beautiful Countess, little imagining that no one in that vast Empire mourned over that fate with such intensity of anguish and remorse as did the Czarina herself.

But even in this conversation, the bitterness of Ivan towards women in general did not fail to find some expression; for he commented upon the bad use the Countess had made of her beauty, and her talents, and the infamous use which the jealous Empress had made of her power, when her rival in beauty and in talent fell under it.

"We were all," said Ivan, "equally foolish not to foresee that the baseness of these two women would be our ruin, if we did not keep aloof from both of them."

This was the final remark which Ivan made

upon the subject, as he withdrew from the Princess, and went to pay his respects to the Countess Münnich, to whom he had not, hitherto, been presented.

It was in accordance with the pitying nature of women, that the Princess Marie was much struck and saddened by the change in Ivan's appearance. The extent of the change was impressed upon her when she compared the present Ivan with the Ivan of their former exile, and she did not love him the less, but all the more, for the signs of sorrow and suffering which were now marked upon his countenance—some of which sorrow and suffering she could not help attributing to her own manœuvres, which had turned out so unsuccessfully.

A party, at which the Field Marshal was the host, could never be dull. There was animated conversation among the elder guests in which Ivan was allowed to join. There were games at cards of which the Russians in that day were exceedingly fond—especially of those games, such as the *Grande Patience*, in which the future

fortunes of the players were supposed to be indicated.

Later on in the evening, the gay Marshal proposed a dance, and followed up his proposal by soliciting the Princess Marie to be his partner. The gaiety of Münnich was infectious. Had any traveller, uninformed as to the use to which the town of Pelem had been mainly put by Russian statesmen, entered that room, on his journey through that town, he might have been struck by the odd contrast between the sordid furniture of the apartment and the high-sounding names of its occupants. But little would he have imagined that it was a company of exiles whom he was surveying, each one of whom had a very sad story to tell.

Ivan was the kind of man to do everything well that he condescended to do ; and he danced admirably. Somehow or other his conclusion that he was already a very aged person did not prevent his entering very heartily into the mirthful spirit of that evening. Nariskoff, who had contrived to get an invitation to this party,

rather surprised some one who knew his morbid humour and wished to extract from him some spiteful comment upon the merry scene, by replying to this man's remarks upon the folly of it in these words.

"I don't see the especial folly. One thing is not more foolish than another in human life ; and if you come to that—to measuring the folly of any particular transaction, I should rather say that dancing was about the least foolish thing that human beings had ever invented. You know it must be very delightful to whirl about, or to be whirled about by, anybody that one liked very much. You and I are long past all that sort of thing."

Now it must not be supposed that this eulogium of dancing, however true, represented Nariskoff's real opinion ; but he was in an especially bad temper, and would not have agreed with anything that anybody said on this occasion. He had been watching for some good result of the scheme he had laboured at so much. He had stealthily approached Ivan and the

Princess, while they were talking to one another, and had overheard enough of the conversation to ascertain that, for the moment at any rate, his scheme had failed. Observing Ivan studiously for the remainder of the evening, he saw that his friend never approached the Princess, and indeed that she was almost the only woman in the room, young or old, whom Ivan did not ask to dance.

The revels ended; and the Princess was accompanied to her father's house (for the Prince had not come with her) by some of those young men who had had the honour of dancing with her.

When alone in her chamber she exclaimed "He is lost to me for ever—for ever! Holy Father" (turning to the lighted picture in the corner of the room), "he is lost to me for ever."

The Princess was one of those rare women whose tears are very distant—who weep inwardly if they weep at all. Ivan had, in former days, been much struck, and somewhat grieved, at this apparent hardness. It was a very unusual condition at that period and in that country, when

even men shed tears with alarming facility. But Marie Andréevna had almost arrived at that state which is now the virile state in the most civilized nations, and which only allows tears to arise, artistically if we may say so—upon the touching representation of tearful subjects; but which ignores their existence in reference to private and personal sorrows.

When disasters had occurred at that wretched town, and when other women were weeping and wailing, the Princess had been very sympathizing, very helpful, but never tearful. Had Ivan seen her now, he would have been astounded at her agony of tears, and still more, perhaps, at the fond words which every now and then broke from her, and were associated with his own name.

The consolations which philosophy affords are but cold comfort to offer to those who are suffering from unrequited love. But if such persons could then think steadily and severely, they might see what a large thing it is to demand that their love should be responded to. The

same course of thought would apply to the demand, often silently though ardently made, for liking, for friendship, or for the full acknowledgment of the claims of relationship ; and, in these minor cases, the voice of reason might sometimes, perhaps, get a hearing. Persons desiring this love, this liking, or this friendship, might possibly bethink themselves that what they secretly demand, it is absolutely impossible for others to give. Why even their very virtues and their merits may stand in the way of fulfilment of their wishes ! They may be very loveable or likeable ; but it is the influence which that loveableness or likeableness of theirs has over another person by reason of his, or her, peculiar susceptibility to it, that is in question. And how large a thing it is to expect that the two susceptibilities should be equivalent ; and in short, that if it chanced that I love you, it would also be likely to happen that you should love me.

These reflections do not exactly apply to the feelings of the Princess Marie at this period, for she had been loved by Ivan, and had, therefore,

at one time satisfied his ideal of what was love-able in woman. But her subsequent conduct had introduced a new element which was now fatal to her renewed desire to be loved; and so she must be left to mourn and wail over the loss of that love which she had, however nobly and with whatever self-sacrifice, thrust from her.

BOOK VI.



CHAPTER VII.

NARISKOFF'S FEARS—A RUSSIAN CEREMONY.—NARISKOFF'S FEARS REALIZED.

THE junior clerk who, meaning most kindly to Ivan, had assigned Pelem as his place of exile, could have known but little of Siberian geography.

In speaking of Siberia, one is apt to forget its immense extent, and, consequently, the great diversity which exists in climate and natural scenery in different parts of that vast Empire, for an Empire it is in itself. There are spots of almost unrivalled beauty and grandeur in

Siberia ; but Pelem was not one of these. It is generally supposed by those who have studied the geography of Siberia, that Pelem was chosen as a place of exile for great political delinquents, on account of its super-eminent disadvantages of climate and situation. For the most part it was approached through vast woods and extensive marshes ; and a more dreary and forbidding landscape than that which met the Exile's eyes as he neared the place of his destination, when that place was Pelem, cannot well be imagined.

The town itself is situated on the river Tavda, an affluent of the river Tobol, from which the district of Tobolsk takes its name. At a little more than half a mile above the town, the river Pelem also falls into the Tobol ; and at a much further distance lies the Lake of Pelem.

The winter which preceded that spring when the new batch of exiles (of whom Ivan was one) arrived at Pelem, had been a very severe one. Quicksilver had frozen to such a degree of hardness that ingenious persons had amused them-

selves by carving little images out of that metal, ordinarily so fluent. The spring, which followed this winter, had come with unusual suddenness and warmth. The experienced inhabitants of the town were in mortal fear of inundation; but their apprehensions did not at first reach the higher classes (the exiles); or, if so, were disregarded by them. Why, indeed, should they fret themselves about a disaster which, if it did come, they could in nowise prevent, or even guard against?

Nariskoff, a timid man, and one who consorted with all ranks of people, was greatly alarmed at what he heard of the results of former inundations, and of the threatening of a greater inundation than ever at the present moment, for so the fears of the peasantry were expressed. Putting aside all his plans for bringing Ivan and the Princess into more favourable relations with each other, Nariskoff now talked of nothing else to Ivan but the prospect of their being overwhelmed by some fatal inundation. Ivan listened with great indifference to these fears of Nariskoff's, though

he could not but take some heed of the facts which Nariskoff, day by day, brought to his notice—such as the rise in inches of the three rivers, and of a slight overflow which had already taken place, according to the report of the peasantry, of the lake of Pelem. This Lake had then a circumference of about fifty-six English miles.

Nariskoff, finding that Ivan turned a deaf ear to all his fears and forebodings, made them known to the Field Marshal. That great engineer, however, did not see his way to do anything which should be a real protection to the town, especially considering the shortness of time that remained for action, if an inundation were to take place on account of the rapid and fierce advent of the spring.

The thoughts of the other inhabitants, even of the frightened peasantry themselves, were much diverted from alarm by the prospect of a coming ceremonial of the Greek Church, which was of the greatest interest to them. The Patron Saint of Turinsk was to pay a visit to the Patron Saint of Pelem.

The form of the ceremony was as follows. The patron Saint of Turinsk was to be conducted by priests and white-robed maidens on the road to Pelem. The Saint of that town was to be borne in like manner to meet its brother Saint; was to receive it with due ceremony; and then to accompany it to its own church. The stranger Saint was there to be honoured with certain prayers and hymns; and was afterwards to be escorted by the Saint of Pelem and the inhabitants of the town for a certain distance on its road home. This final part of the ceremony was to take place the same evening.

Much and diverse preparation was made by both towns for this coming ceremonial. Robes had to be prepared; hymns had to be practised; and whatever, in that dismal district, of flower and foliage could be got to grace the festival, was to be eagerly sought for.

Meanwhile, not less threatening, though less heeded, were the accounts which Nariskoff heard from the peasantry, and reported to all those who would listen to him, showing the proxi-

mity of danger from the rapid rising of the rivers.

Ivan had been solicited to take a part in the forthcoming festive proceedings ; but he had resolutely kept aloof from them. His superior enlightenment, or what he supposed to be such, made him despise this childish ceremony, as he called it, of the meeting of the Patron Saints. Besides, if he were to take any part in it, this might bring him more in contact with the Princess Marie ; and he had absolutely determined to avoid any companionship with her. She, though with a heavy heart, was obliged to give her services. Her superior knowledge of music naturally conferred upon her the place of leader in the choir of maidens, who were to take so large a part in the ceremony. And, moreover, being a duteous daughter of her Church, she did not perceive any childishness, or irreverence, in this festival.

The eventful day dawned. It was a day of unusual heat for that season ; but this, though an additional danger, was disregarded. That it

was fine weather at that moment, was a fact which delighted all the inhabitants of Pelem, whatever mischief might thereupon accrue.

Very early in the morning, even before daylight, they had marched out with their Saint, and had arrived at the spot where a long, narrow, wooden bridge spanned the river Tavda. At this bridge, according to the usage of former years, the Pelemites waited for the arrival of the stranger Saint from Turinsk. On the present occasion it did not make its welcome presence visible until many hours after the accustomed time of meeting.

During the interval of waiting, the men of Pelem beguiled the time, partly by singing hymns, partly by uttering very severe objurgations on the dilatory nature of the men of Turinsk.

One old man told his fellow-citizens, that a similar delay had occurred forty years ago, long before most of them had been born, and that he remembered it because it preceded by three days the great inundation which had swept away the

palisading and one-third of the town of Pelem. For the moment this unpleasant reminiscence awoke the fears of the crowd; but these were soon forgotten when the stranger Saint, accompanied by a larger number than usual of the young men and maidens of Turinsk, was first visible in the distance.

When, however, those of Turinsk had joined their fellow-worshippers of Pelem, sad were the stories they had to tell of the difficulties and dangers they had undergone. Bridges had been carried away; small rivulets were now rivers; and morasses were lakes. They would never have reached the spot, if they had not made detours, which they estimated, perhaps with some exaggeration, as having lengthened out the distance more than fourteen miles.

The men of Pelem were glad to tell them that there was no extraordinary difficulty to be met with between the wooden bridge and the town of Pelem.

The intensity of religious feeling which this ceremony produced, sufficed to lull all fears, and

the procession moved gladly on towards the town.

The elder personages, who had remained in the town, such as Marshal Münnich, his Countess, and Prince Serbatoff, together with those whom sickness had prevented from attending the ceremony, had not been without great anxiety during these hours of suspense which preceded the return of their own people, and the advent of the Saints into the town.

Nariskoff, as may be imagined, had not taken any part in this religious ceremonial. He had occupied himself in going from house to house of those persons who had been obliged to remain, adding to their alarm by his declaration that something dreadful must have occurred: that, for his part, he was sure that the Lake of Pelem had broken all bounds, and had overwhelmed priests, and Saints, and their foolish worshippers. The sneers and scoffs of the irreverent Nariskoff at the folly of the ceremonial, would have brought down condign punishment upon his head, if he had addressed them to any per-

sons but the sickly, the aged, and the judicious.

Throughout the greater part of the day he was in and out of Ivan's log-hut, fulminating diatribes against all religious services, and those of the Greek Church in particular, and assuring Ivan, that now one of his troubles would be well over, for that he would never more see anything of that hard-hearted young lady, the Princess Marie Andréevna.

Ivan had not large faith in anything that Nariskoff could say; but still he was so much moved by it, and, to say the truth, so much plagued by Nariskoff's constant interruptions, that he resolved to go out, and see whether anything had happened.

He asked Nariskoff to accompany him; but that prudent personage entirely declined to do so, saying that he must stay in the town to comfort poor Prince Serbatoff, and that bedridden Polish lady, Tatiana Michäelovna Selinofsky, both of those "exceedingly foolish persons" having, as he said, allowed their only daughters

to take a principal part in this idiotic business. If he had been blessed, or cursed, with a daughter, (he really should not like to pledge himself as to whether children were more of a blessing or a curse) he should at least have been wise enough, or paternal enough, to have kept the girl at home to-day.

Ivan made no reply, but left his hut, and went quickly out of the town. He soon met the procession coming back in a high state of jubilation; and, on doing so, almost regretted that he had been induced by Nariskoff's timidity to quit his studies. He was not, however, unobservant of certain signs which led him to believe that there was still some danger to be apprehended. Amongst other things, he noticed that in certain spots which, hitherto, though bordering upon morasses, had always afforded a sure footing, there were gurgling noises and a slight bubbling up of water, such as may often be seen in the springs which are the origin of great rivers—and that the footing was no longer sure.

Ivan joined the procession, and lent his voice

in the singing of the hymns. All was now gladness and merriment. The men of Turinsk seemed to have forgotten their previous labours and difficulties : the men of Pelem had forgotten their vexation and their anger at the delay which had occurred.

Ivan drew near to the Princess Marie, and spoke anxiously to her of the signs of danger he had noticed, at the same time suggesting that it might not be prudent on her part to accompany the stranger Saint on its return home.

The Princess Marie had observed that he had addressed several persons before he approached her ; and, from his gestures she conjectured, and rightly, that he had been making similar suggestions to them. Moreover, he had spoken coldly ; had shown no interest on his own account ; had chiefly alluded to any anxiety she might cause her father ; and, what was worse, had even spoken contemptuously, though not exactly in Nariskoff's language, of the silliness of the whole proceeding. She, therefore, replied coldly, merely saying that she should not desert her

post, and indeed that it was impossible for her to do so, seeing that she was the leader of the choir of their own maidens. He made no further attempt to dissuade her; and did not long remain by her side.

There was great feasting in Pelem that day; and never was more abundant honour shown to the stranger Saint of Turinsk.

Then the procession was formed for the return; and it left the town with more joyous sounds of religious mirthfulness than had ever been known on any previous occasion. Whatever fear of danger or of difficulty survived in the breasts of the joyful throng, only served to give force to, and enhance, the fervour of their devotion.

Ivan did not make one of this procession; but he looked long and wistfully after it, as it left the town; and there was a vague and indefinable sensation of fear at his heart, which he could not quite dispel. He returned to his books; but, somehow or other, he found that he could not command his attention; and he began to think, with almost a contempt for himself, that he

wished Nariskoff would come and worry him again, and urge him to go out. "Otherwise I shall not go," he said, "for these are mere foolish fancies ; but that poor Prince would indeed be a miserable creature if anything were to happen to her."

Half an hour had not passed before Nariskoff did make his appearance in Ivan's hut ; and this time his alarm was pitiful to behold.

It is a curious fact, but it is a fact, that we often find that those persons whose lives seem to have least in them that should be worth preserving, appear to have most care for living on.

Nariskoff did not urge Ivan to go out in search of the procession ; but suggested that they should both pay a visit to the Marshal, and stay in his upper room if anything should happen. He, Nariskoff, had heard, in the last half-hour, strange noises. "Come out now, De Biron, and see if you do not hear them."

Ivan did come, and walked with Nariskoff to that end of the town opposite to the one which led to the wood. He, too, thought that he heard

strange noises, not exactly like the murmur of winds, or distant thunder, or like any sound that had hitherto been known to him. Without saying another word, the two companions separated.

Nariskoff went to the Marshal's house to pay a visit which he resolved should be a long one, while Ivan started off, at a swift pace, on the road which the procession had taken. As he did so, the alarming sounds became more defined. He could hardly doubt that danger was coming, and made great speed to meet it. In a moment, as it were, though only for a moment, the old love returned upon him with all its force—indeed with a deeper feeling than ever—as he thought of the imminent danger of her who was once so dear to him. He had no doubt now of what was about to happen.

And, indeed, it had begun to happen. The swollen river and the full-to-overflowing lake had, together, at the same moment, burst their bounds; and about six miles off had formed volumes of water, which were descending upon the town. Awful as the danger was, it was not

so great as it would have been in any country that did not offer so vast a plain as that surrounding Pelem did, for the waters to flow over. Moreover, as it was afterwards ascertained, there were two separate floods ; and the weaker wave had come first.

Ivan rushed forward at his utmost speed. At length he came in sight of the procession hurrying back. The Saint of Pelem was still held aloft by the devoted acolytes ; and close around it, some order was still maintained. But, in front, the terror-stricken crowd, pursued by the waters, were struggling onwards in complete disorder. Ivan rendered what assistance he could to some of the weaker ones, who were the foremost of the stragglers ; but soon made his way to the denser part of the multitude, amongst whom was the Princess Marie, still maintaining her place, and still, though few voices joined with hers, singing a hymn of joy and deliverance which sounded strangely in that scene of horror. The danger was not yet by any means at its uttermost ; but, as it increased, men, women and

children, deserting all order, rushed madly on.

In ten minutes the full flood had come with all its force upon them; and it was now that the weaker part of the crowd had to battle for dear life. Ivan was by Marie's side. He had caught up a child of about three years old, and bore it in his arms. He did not speak a word to the Princess, nor she to him; but he offered his hand, which she grasped; and they fled on together. Though the flood which surrounded them was still shallow, spreading as it did over that immense plain, there were spots where the waters of the flood, falling upon some portion of morass, were many feet in depth. Into one of these the Princess eventually fell; and her fall was nearly being disastrous to Ivan and the child he carried with him. He, however, kept his footing and succeeded in extricating her. He then bade her take the child in her arms. There was a certain sternness, at the moment, in his tone; and she at once obeyed him. He then lifted her up in his arms, and carried her

on towards the town. Once they were very near destruction, for Ivan himself fell, but fortunately it was not in a morass; and, while falling, he retained hold of the Princess, and even kept her above the water. At length, in a state of great exhaustion he reached the town, and bore his burden in safety to her father's house. During their perilous progress through the waters, neither the Princess nor Ivan had spoken.

The gratitude of the Prince found full vent in words; but words seem to have been denied to the Princess. At last, however, she faintly and hesitatingly thanked Ivan; and he went away to see if he could find the parents of the child, to restore it to them.

The town of Pelem was not overwhelmed by this inundation, nor was there much loss of life, except amongst the children. The state, however, of those people, the majority of the town, who dwelt in log-huts, was very deplorable. The Prince could do no less (and he did it gratefully and gladly) than invite Ivan to share their home; but to the astonishment of the

Prince, though not to that of his daughter, this kindly offer was distinctly declined.

In fact, and certainly in fiction, such an adventure as that which has just been recorded, generally serves to bring even estranged lovers together again in harmony, and at least to remove some part of the estrangement; but it did not do so with Ivan and the Princess Marie. After the flood had abated, and the town had resumed its customary aspect, there was no change to be noticed in the relation between these two, unless, indeed, it might have been seen that the Princess Marie grew embarrassed, and shrank timidly back if she could do so without observation, whenever, by accident, Ivan approached her. This mode of conduct was very unusual in the Princess, and very repugnant to her resolute and still somewhat haughty nature. But the feeling which induced such conduct was that of one who has a debt of gratitude to pay and cannot pay it; who knows, moreover, that an attempt to pay it, would only be met by a haughty disavowal on the part of

the benefactor of any payment of the kind being necessary.

Notwithstanding this silence, for hardly a word ever passed between Ivan and the Princess, each could not help thinking a great deal of the other, and still more did each think anxiously of his or her own feeling towards that other. The Princess strove to think down her love : Ivan, to prevent his from rising again into full life to torment him. But self-examination of this kind does not tend to peace ; and, as one who listens intently at night, will hear noises, and the more abundantly, the more he dreads to hear them, so the Princess and Ivan found that their much inquiry, as regards the feelings of their own hearts, did not allay alarm by reassuring them of stillness.

BOOK VII.

BOOK VII.



CHAPTER I.

AZRA APPEARS IN A NEW OPERA—THE EMPRESS
AND THE ACTRESS—AZRA ASKS FOR AN AUDIENCE
—THE EMPRESS RECEIVES HER ON THE FOLLOW-
ING DAY.

THIS narrative includes many migrations of persons, and many changes of scene. Though Pelem and St. Petersburg are very widely apart, they were yet, in those days, very intimately connected; and, as it has been seen, any signal event at the capital resulted in consequences at Pelem of the most joyful or the saddest kind.

With most persons it is some distant event,

some event over which they have had no control, that has the greatest influence over their fortunes. It is as if each life were represented by a ray of light; and where these rays intersect, especially if they are rays of strength, there is formed a focus of consuming power, which has abiding influence for good, or evil, on the lives in question.

When mention was last made of Azra, she had returned to rehearsal after a painful interview with Ivan; had seen him taken away as a prisoner; and, after a few days' interval, had appeared on the stage in the opera in which she had performed the principal part at Paris.

For some reason or other, this opera did not suit the Russian taste; and, after running a short time, was set aside in favour of an old Russian play, adapted to music and descriptive of a by-gone period in Russian history. It was a very poor thing when compared with the opera which Azra had brought from Paris; but there was, at that time, in Russia, a great dislike for, and jealousy of, any foreigner; and this dislike and

jealousy extended to foreign things, as well as persons.

Azra, who had learnt in Paris that most expressive of gestures, the shrugging of the shoulders, made no further objection to the manager's proposal to bring this Russian play upon the stage, than what might have been indicated by this gesture. Then, like a true artist, who disdains to be suppressed by any inferiority in the work to be done, Azra threw all her force and energy into the preparation for her new part.

The Czarina had much better taste than most of those, even of the highest rank and best education, whom she governed. She would, probably, have much preferred to listen to the Parisian opera. Finding, however, from the talk at Court, that this opera was not particularly acceptable to a Russian audience, the politic Empress did not encourage the continued performance of it by her Imperial presence. When the native opera, if so it may be called, though the music was chiefly selected from

Rameau's works, was brought upon the stage, and was pronounced to be successful, the Empress went in state to hear it.

Azra was one of those persons who always try to do their best; and if she had had to play in a barn before rude boors, she would not have neglected to put forth her utmost powers. Encouragement, no doubt, had the same sympathetic effect upon her that it almost always has upon those, whether orators, musicians, or singers, who have to present themselves, as it were, to the public. This, in her case as in that of most artists, is not an effect of gratified vanity, but a pure result of appreciative sympathy. How can one know when one is pleasing others, unless they are good enough to tell one so? and no man, or woman, knows what he, or she, can do in any department of life, until they have received the immense impulse which appreciation gives to all the sons and daughters of mankind.

The Czarina perceived at once how pleasing to her subjects this opera must be; and, bound by no small notions of Imperial etiquette, was as

hearty in her applause as any one of the meanest of her subjects in the gallery.

The part which Azra had to perform in this opera, was that of a Queen; and the good-natured Elizabeth more than once remarked to her favourite Mavra Schepelof, loudly enough to be heard by the surrounding courtiers, that the little woman was quite a Queen, and that she (Elizabeth) would do well to take some lessons from her, in order to perform her own part more effectively.

At the end of the fourth act, the Empress sent for the actress.

The Russian Court, from the days of Peter the Great to the present time, has ever been most munificent in its recognition of artistic talent. The Czarina had chosen a splendid present for the Signora Hurtaldi; and it would have been given, if the performance had been only of a mediocre character; but, on this occasion, it was felt both by the Sovereign and by her suite that the gift, however splendid, was amply deserved.

It is rarely allowed to monarchs to blame

and sometimes they must, almost perforce, (unless they are very sincere persons,) praise somewhat insincerely. It must, therefore, be a peculiar pleasure to them when a hearty sense of approval unites with policy, and when they can praise, not merely representatively and officially, but also individually and personally. Elizabeth really looked forward with pleasure to the approach of the mimic sovereign. The reception was in the ante-chamber to the Imperial box. Azra entered, conducted by the manager; and, kneeling before the Empress, kissed her hand.

“Rise, my sister,” said Elizabeth, “it ill becomes so great a Queen to kneel to any other monarch.”

So saying, she stooped down a little, for she was much taller than Azra, and kissed her on the cheek.

“We wished to tell you, sister mine, how pleased We have been with your performance. We have been saying that We ourselves might have learnt something from your dignity, for the Imperial acting on Our own stage. We hope

that Our good sister will deign to accept this slight token of sisterly regard."

The Empress then placed in Azra's hands a bracelet of great value. It was composed of diamonds and turquoises (turquoises were then very rare), which encircled a portrait of the Empress herself.

Azra took it, and then said:—"The portrait, madam, will ever be most dear to me; and the jewels are most beautiful; but oh, if I might ask for something more precious to me than all the jewels in the world."

Elizabeth's face darkened a little. She was not accustomed to find her gifts so coldly received.

The quick-sighted gypsy did not fail to notice the stern expression which came over the Empress's countenance. Azra's presence of mind was lost for the moment: she hung her head, and looked like the shy young girl that she had shown herself to be when she first entered the Serbatoff Palace to plead for Ivan with the Princess Marie.

The Empress immediately noticed the change. She was mollified by it, and smiled. She may have thought to herself how soon the mimic sovereign pales before the real one. And then she said:—"Well, child, what is it that you want? We thought jewels were not unwelcome to any of our sex. Men, at least, are pleased to say so; and whatever they say, signora, must approach a wisdom that our lower nature cannot attain to. Is it not so, my Lords?"

Azra, encouraged by the playful words of the Czarina, found boldness enough to say. "If I might see Your Majesty alone, I would venture to make my humble request."

"You shall have your wish, my child. My Lord Chamberlain, see that the Signora Hurtaldi has an audience of us to-morrow afternoon."

After this, Azra was conducted from the ante-chamber by the manager; and, in a few minutes, appeared again upon the stage.

Her performance, in the fifth act, was very fitful. Sometimes she was as queenly as ever, and her voice was as rich, full, and true as

ever : at other times she was singularly embarrassed and ineffective. Those who were connoisseurs in acting, remarked that the Signora must be ill, but still what a great actress she was ; and how wonderfully she bore up against this sudden attack of illness.

The Empress was very thoughtful during this fifth act. The rapid changes in Azra's mode of acting were not lost upon her. "I wonder," she said to her favourite, "what her stage majesty wants : what a refined creature she is ! Avarice, love, vanity,—these are the three levers that move womankind. Aye, and mankind too, my Mavra. The first does not move her : the third may do so, for in this theatrical world there are as many jealousies and vanities, I believe, as at a Court ; and she may have some grievance against the manager."

Meanwhile, as the acting went on, the Empress suddenly said. "No, Mavra, it is not vanity : the embarrassment is too great for that. There only remains 'love,' and what can I do for that ? We, ourselves cannot make people

love us who foolishly decline to do so, (here the Empress whispered something to her favourite), and, as for comforting all the distressed damsels of our Empire, that would indeed be a task beyond Imperial, perhaps beyond angelic, power ! ”

BOOK VII.



CHAPTER II.

THE EMPRESS'S CONJECTURES AS TO THE IDENTITY OF
AZRA—AZRA'S AUDIENCE.

GREAT sovereigns are apt to have long memories, and are peculiarly vexed if their memory fails them on any point. It seemed strange to herself, but the Empress Elizabeth, as she returned to the Winter Palace, could not help thinking over the events of the evening's performance at the opera, and when she was under the hands of her tire-women, she suddenly exclaimed. "I see it all: what a beclouded being I have been, Mavra! (The favourite was

still with her Royal mistress.) That is the gypsy girl: the sister—the so-called sister—of that learned traitor, Ivan de Biron. Her jewels and her queenly presence, for the girl has something regal about her, deceived me for the moment; but, when she held the bracelet in her hand, and looked anything but like a queen, it was the same girl who claimed that unfaithful Ivan as her brother—unfaithful to her, I doubt not, as to me his sovereign. Ah! They are a bad set, these men: not worthy of us, Mavra, fickle as the west wind.”

The favourite thought to herself, but did not utter the thought, that if she might judge from her imperial mistress’s conduct, fickleness was not entirely confined to men; but she merely replied:—“Your majesty is doubtless right, it must be the same person. Your majesty never forgets a face.”

“It is so, Mavra; I am certain of it—and she will come to intercede for him: his infidelity only another incentive to her faithfulness. How weak we are!”

It may seem surprising that the Empress had not before known, what had hitherto been well known to all the upper classes of St. Petersburg—that Azra and the Signora Hurtaldi were one and the same person, and that Ivan had been her devoted admirer. Royal and Imperial personages, however, being in the habit of leading the conversation, and of eliciting rather than receiving information, it did so happen that the Czarina had been almost the only person, of any note in St. Petersburg, who was not thoroughly cognizant of these facts.

On the following afternoon the Empress was perfectly prepared to receive Azra; and it was with a heavy heart that the good-natured lady was so prepared. “He has deceived her: he has deceived me. These learned men are a shade worse even than the others. I suppose they get it from their books. Yet, in those books, the wretches, most times, make themselves out to be true-hearted.”

Azra was announced; and the Empress received her most cordially.

Elizabeth had but little time to spare for interviews of this kind. Moreover, she looked forward to a rather painful scene; and, on that account alone, was anxious to get the interview over as quickly as possible. She at once commenced the conversation in her usual clear, decided, resonant voice.

“I know it all: I know what you have come for. The Signora Hurtaldi is no other than Azra the gypsy.”

“Yes: Madam.”

“And Azra the gypsy once said that she was the sister of Ivan de Biron?”

“Yes: Madam.”

“And the Signora Hurtaldi is of the same mind as Azra the gypsy, and loves Ivan de Biron: for the folly of us women is infinite.”

“Yes, and no; Madam.” Azra timidly replied.

“And Ivan de Biron is as false to Azra as he has been to his Sovereign.”

“No; Madam, no! Ivan de Biron is the truest of the true! I have been with him in

sickness and in health ; in poverty and in riches ; but he never spoke of Your Majesty, even when he was resolved to fight for the Duchess Regent, otherwise than with the greatest respect. Ivan is incapable of ingratitude ; and, after Your Majesty had taken him into your service, would have died rather than betray his Imperial Mistress. I would answer with my life for Ivan. They deceive you, Madam."

The Empress smiled. "Large as your knowledge is of Courts, my royal sister, I do not admit that you are conversant with all the state affairs of Our Empire."

"Ah ! Madam, I know nothing of state affairs, but I know something of Ivan de Biron, and I know that he is incapable of falsehood, or ingratitude."

"You speak as a lover, Signora," replied the Empress. "We women are always sure of the perfections of our lovers : but I fear your testimony would not carry much weight with Our Grand Chancellor. Is this Ivan then so very dear to you ?"

Azra paused for a moment, and looked down upon the ground. "He does not say so, Madam."

"What is the mystery then, my child? Tell it me all, and tell it quickly. We would do you a service, but we have scant time to listen to a story, if it is to be told as it is told in Our courts of justice."

"Madam, I did love Ivan, and I do love Ivan—better," she added, after a pause, "than any one else in the world; but not with his kind of love, though I once thought it was so. But he would have me all to himself."

"They are all alike, all selfish;" said the Empress.

"I must quit the stage," said Azra, "I must give up that which is the life of lives to me."

The Empress had heard many strange things in the course of her eventful career, but it may be doubted whether she had ever heard anything that more astonished her than this last sentence of Azra's. She, herself, had often said, "that love was everything in this world: that there was nothing to be compared with it." She had

often, too, thought and said, that she would have given up empire to be really loved. And here was this girl, who would not give up the pleasure of representing mimic sovereignty for the real blessing of being truly loved.

“I do not understand you ;” said the Empress. “This Ivan loves you ; and you love him ; and yet you cannot leave the stage for him.”

“He does love me, or, at least, he thinks he does, but his real love was, and perhaps is, for the Princess Marie Andréevna Serbatoff.”

“More revelations !” exclaimed the Empress. “It seems that I know little of what goes on around me in my own Court.”

At this moment there was a knock at the door, and a page entered and said, that the Grand Chancellor was in waiting to see Her Majesty by appointment.

“No ; no : not now. We cannot see him now. Let him wait ;” said the Empress.

It would be tedious to the reader to recount what is already so well known to him. Suffice it to say that the Empress, now deeply interested

in this love affair, so different in its characteristics from anything of the kind she had known before, was quite oblivious, for the moment, of state affairs. By degrees, she elicited from Azra the whole story of Ivan's life as far as Azra knew it, beginning from that day when Ivan and his master, the Duke of Courland, had met the gypsies, up to the seizure and second banishment of Ivan to Siberia. Azra could not explain or justify the conduct attributed to Ivan, which the Empress so deeply blamed, in reference to the Lapouschin conspiracy. Azra could only declare, from her knowledge of his character, that it was impossible he could have joined in injurious talk against any one who had been so great a benefactress to him as the Czarina.

Elizabeth heard the whole story with great patience, pausing every now and then to reflect, for the moment, upon what she did hear. Afterwards, without signifying by a single word what impression the story had made upon her, she dismissed Azra decisively, but very graciously, leaving the great actress in supreme doubt

as to what would be the result of the interview.

The Empress herself was in doubt. Her feelings against Ivan had been, and were, very bitter. His conduct had seemed to her such a signal instance of treachery, that she could not at once overcome her repugnance to him. After recounting the interview to her favourite, Mavra Schepelof, the only words she uttered—and she uttered them with a sigh—were, “It seems to me, my good Mavra, that neither poets, philosophers, nor men of the world, and these latter should know something, have ever known anything about the love of women. It is, I think, a mistake of nature to have paired us off so badly. You remember the Princess Marie Andréevna. I always thought that girl had met with some great disappointment. The face is not true to the mind, and will betray its secrets, let the mind be ever so resolute to keep its counsel.

“Bestuchef may come in now. No; stay. Have you ever thought, Mavra, that there may be a sex in souls? All the time that soft-looking,

velvety-cheeked girl, to the outward eye so rich in woman's charms, was telling her story, I thought how like she was to a man, who would sacrifice anything to an idea—but very little for a person. Yes, the Chancellor may come in. He, too, is one of those noble beings, as they think themselves, who would immolate us all, myself the first, to render sure some stroke of finely-tempered policy."

BOOK VII.



CHAPTER III.

IVAN, WHEN ARRESTED, DESIRES HIS SERVANT KALYNCH TO PROCEED AT ONCE TO THE DUKE OF COURLAND AND INFORM HIM OF HIS FATE—THE DUKE APPLIES FOR LEAVE TO WRITE TO IVAN—THE LETTER SEEN BY THE EMPRESS AND THE GOVERNOR—KALYNCH ALLOWED TO BE THE BEARER, AND TO BE REINSTATED IN IVAN'S SERVICE.

IVAN, when he was arrested on the stage of the opera-house, did not imagine that he should have any opportunity of communicating the fact of his arrest to any of his dependants. The officer, however, who had arrested him, had

gone first to his lodgings, to inquire for him there. The appearance there of an officer accompanied by three private soldiers, was sure, at that time, to awaken suspicion in any household, as to the fate of its master. The faithful Kalynch instantly conjectured what was the object of this inauspicious visit; and he had the wit to follow the officer at a respectful distance. As Ivan and his captors entered the carriage which was to convey them to Schlüsselberg, Kalynch contrived to approach it; and Ivan was able, unobserved, to whisper a few words to him. These words were: "Go and tell His Highness that I am perfectly innocent, whatever the charge may be."

Movement in Russia, from one place to another, was not a very easy matter for a man in Kalynch's position; and it would have been almost impossible if he had been a serf. But being a freeman, and a Courlander, he could claim the right to dispose of himself; and the authorities acquiesced in his petition to be allowed to return to his former master.

On such an event as the exile of their master,

the first thought of the members of Ivan's household was, "What will Kalynch say now?" And even Ivan himself astonished the government courier, who travelled in the same carriage with him, by exclaiming, grimly smiling as he said so, "What will dear old Kalynch say now?"

Kalynch, as it may be remembered, had foretold that a signal piece of good fortune was to befall his young master after the evil fortune of the rejection of his love by Azra. This was undoubted: it was the inevitable order of the march of events according to the Kalynch law. He, however, was the only person not disturbed by this apparent contradiction. Facts may be flexible, but theories are rigid. Kalynch now perceived that the rejection of Ivan's suit by Azra, was only a continuation of the good fortune which Ivan had met with in his favour at Court. "Blind must the man be," said Kalynch, "who did not perceive that." And the whole household were comforted. But it is to be feared that Ivan, not being made cognizant of this lucid explanation of the facts of the case, did not derive

equal comfort to that which had been administered to his household by the prophetic Kalynch.

It is almost needless to add that the metaphor of the comet was introduced. The nucleus was the favour at Court: the tail was the rejection of Ivan by one who was quite unworthy of him, as Kalynch now did not fail to perceive.

The Duke of Courland's affairs were in abeyance. It was still uncertain whether he would be reinstated in the possession of his Duchy, for which there were potent competitors. Moreover the Czarina, though very favourably disposed to the ex-Regent, remembering the kindness she had received from him in former days, had not ventured to bring him to Court, knowing full well how hateful his presence would be to many of those nobles whom she was anxious to conciliate. The poet may say that "Lightly vanishes from the sunlit earth the trace of human deeds,"* but not so from the hearts of those who have

* "Leicht Verschwindet der Thäten Spur
Von der Sonnebeleuchteten Erde."—*Schiller*.

been injured by such deeds. And so it was not an unwise precaution on the part of the Empress to keep the Duke of Courland at a distance from St. Petersburg. The place of residence assigned to him was Jaroslaw.

His Highness was greatly dismayed by the intelligence which Kalynch brought to him. He had viewed the favour, which he supposed Ivan to retain with the Empress, as a means for himself of approaching her; and it was not without some satisfaction that he had hitherto thought that, at any rate, one member of his family, bearing his name, was able to hold his own at Court.

There was, however, one piece of intelligence brought by Kalynch which still more disturbed and distressed the Duke. This was the news, current now throughout St. Petersburg, that the Serbatoffs had been arrested and sent to Pelem. The Duke's feelings towards the Princess Marie were still those of the tenderest gratitude. He was wont to say to himself, that if he had known her earlier, he should have been a different man. Men are very fond of saying that if something

had happened which did not happen, they should have been very different ; and doubtless not only much happier, but much better than they have been.

The Duke asked leave to be allowed to write a letter to Ivan. This request was first addressed to the governor of Jaroslaw, was by him submitted to the Empress, and was granted—subject to the condition that the letter should be shown to the governor.

This letter contained, as might be expected, a severe objurgation of Ivan's conduct. The Duke was obliged to assume that Ivan had, in some way or other, been connected with the Lapouschin conspiracy. Very bitter were the Duke's reproaches upon this head, and very pleasing both to the governor and the Empress (for the letter was shown to her) were the terms in which the Duke spoke of Ivan's unaccountable ingratitude. Even in this official letter, the Duke, though speaking severely of Prince Serbatoff, assuming him too to have been one of the Lapouschin conspirators, contrived to impress upon

Ivan that he should devote himself to the service of the Serbatoff family and pay them every possible attention.

The Empress was somewhat astonished at this mention of the Serbatoffs. She knew full well the feud that had existed between the two houses and that the Prince had originally been banished by the Empress Anne, solely at the urgent request of the Duke of Courland. The Czarina, however, thought this kindness to the Serbatoff family was only another instance of the greatness of Biron's character, and of the improvement which had taken place in it by reason of his own sufferings in exile.

Kalynch, accompanied by a government courier, was permitted to be the bearer of this missive, and was, if it were allowed by the authorities at Pelem, to re-enter Ivan's service.

BOOK VII.



CHAPTER IV.

THE REJOICINGS AT ST. PETERSBURG AFTER A VICTORY—THE EMPRESS ALONE IN HER PALACE—HER REMORSE AND SORROW AT THE BLOODSHED OCCASIONED BY THIS VICTORY—THE DUKE OF COURLAND SEEKS AN AUDIENCE OF HER MAJESTY.

It was a day of high rejoicing in St. Petersburg. The news of a great victory had arrived two days before; and this day was appointed for its celebration. Few capitals in the world were more fitted for representation of this kind than the capital of Russia—that larger Venice set in snow. Unlike most of the

European cities of that period, the newly-built St. Petersburg had no tortuous streets and narrow alleys ; and, whatever devices of adornment were adopted, could be widely seen—seen, too, for the most part, with the redoubled beauty of reflection in the glistening waters of the Neva.

In the morning, there had been a grand service at the Cathedral : in the afternoon, there had been a great review in front of the Winter Palace. At both of these ceremonials the Empress had assisted ; and the review had just concluded, as the evening came on. The illuminations had already commenced ; and, from the windows of the Palace, the reflected lights of earthly origin gleamed brightly in the waters of the Neva—outshining far their pale prototypes, the stars.

It was a day of real festivity, in which every one of the Czarina's subjects partook, the national pride being excited to the uttermost. The victory, great in itself, had moreover this additional joy attending it, that it was unexpected : for the Russian forces had previously suffered a partial defeat.

One heart, and one alone, was supremely wretched; and its wretchedness lacked not the added misery of imperative concealment. The thorns must be turned inwards.

The Empress had come back from the review, and was alone in her own apartments. She had even dismissed the favourite, Mavra Schepelof. It was in the magnificent costume of a Russian sovereign that the Czarina had reviewed the troops. Suddenly she took off the crown, and threw it down upon a table, whence it rolled heavily upon the ground; and, at the same moment, she burst into an agony of tears.

“What have I done, what have we all done, that there should be such misery upon the earth,—and that too, of our own making! Combien d’innocens ont perdu la vie.* Can they lay their blood upon me? I fear they can. And what a load it is to carry! And yet how oft my words

* The very words which she afterwards used in public, when lamenting over the victory of Cunersdorf.

for peace have been overborne by all these crafty statesmen who surround me.

“This will be no answer at the final day. Oh I am guilty—doubly, trebly guilty! Why did I ever take the burden of the Empire upon me? Why listen to that feather-headed fool, Lestocq?

“We are like insects, imprisoned in a room. They think they have power to wander thence, as they list, into the free air. No hindrance intervenes, as they fondly imagine; but when the poor bewildered creatures drive against the hard crystal, it holds them back as surely as if it were marble. So is it with us great ones. Who should control Elizabeth of Russia? And yet, were she really all-powerful, would there be any of these wars? She is only one of these poor insects battling against those seemingly easy outlets, in truth impassable for her.”

The unhappy woman said no more for some time; but, sitting down at a table, with her head between her hands, looked out fixedly through a window which was opposite, and which com-

manded a full view of some of the most brilliant of the illuminations.

After a time, there arose a great clamour in the open square before the Palace, and in the surrounding streets. The Czarina understood what this clamour meant. It was that she should show herself to the assembled populace, and receive their final acclamations. Whatever her anguish might be, no thought of disappointing her subjects entered her brave mind. It was part of a sovereign's business, and it must be done. Hastily she took up the unwelcome crown, placed it upon her head, composed her features and her dress, not forgetting to look into one of the surrounding mirrors as she did so.

Then she stepped out upon the balcony, and with smiles, which were needless as they could not be seen from that distance, received the tumultuous plaudits of the people, bowing graciously as she did so.

When this had been repeated sufficiently, she again retired into the room, and again broke out into the direst lamentations. These were so loud

that they were overheard by the favourite, who, though dismissed, had not gone further than the adjoining ante-chamber.

Mavra Schepelof really loved her Imperial mistress. She partially conjectured what the feelings of that mistress were. She could sympathize with her distress, but not with the tender feelings that caused it, for the favourite was a stateswoman, versed in intrigues, and deeply ambitious for Russia. The Czarina knew this—knew all that Mavra would say to comfort her—knew how unavailing it was, and that she herself was, for the moment, utterly alone in the world.

Her thoughts turned to her “dear brothers and sisters,” the other sovereigns of Europe. Did they feel as she did? Was there any sympathy to be found in them? No: she told herself: her present anguish would be inconceivable to the hard king whose armies she had conquered, and for whose soldiery, as well as for her own, her heart was bleeding.

“And if he could conceive my feelings, how he

would despise them ! The very mothers do not feel with me," she said, "the mothers who have lost their children, for they are told that their sons have died for the honour of Russia, and their pride wrestles with and mostly overcomes their love. But I am the mother of them all, and a wicked mother ; not as the world says, but as I say, and know, and feel, and shall, for ever, say and know, and feel. And all their glozing words bring no comfort to my soul."

This last utterance was so loud, and so full of anguish, that Mavra could restrain herself no longer. She knocked at the door, and quickly entered.

"I fear Your Majesty is not well ;" she said. "May I come in ?"

"No : I am not unwell, my dear:" said the Empress, in a gentle, mournful voice, "but I have much to do:" and, hereupon, she affected to busy herself with some papers that were upon the table. "I would rather be alone just now."

Mavra Schepelof did not venture to stay after

this dismissal, but again retired to the ante-chamber.

With persons of Elizabeth's form and temperament, great agitation of mind is often suddenly cut short and benumbed by sleep; and so it was with her on this occasion. After her last outburst of anger and vexation, and when Mavra Schepelof had left the room, the Empress suddenly fell forward on the table, and was lost in sleep.

Many praiseful sayings have been uttered of sleep, how it "knits up the ravelled sleeve of care," and the like; but its exceeding graciousness is most discerned in this:—that it is nearly sure to change the current of our thoughts. Dreamland insists upon being quite another country to Earthland. If it were not so; if, however fantastically, dreams ran on in the same groove as the severest and most urgent thoughts of the day, men's lives would be much shorter than they are.

Amid the tens of thousands whom the Empress had seen in her progress to and

from the Cathedral, and during her review of the troops, one group of persons had riveted her attention. They had been standing near the steps of the cathedral. It was a family group of the poorer classes. The boys were in front of their parents. Two of them were about the ages of twelve and thirteen; and the Empress had noticed the tender way in which the elder boy kept an arm around the other's neck, the other being apparently a sickly child. It was not the first time the Empress had observed the affectionate ways and gestures of boys of this age to one another; and, as she passed along, bowing and smiling to the right and left, and particularly noticing this little family group, the thought had passed through her mind as to whether girls of that age were equally fond of one another, or, at least equally demonstrative in their affection.

This little episode of thought was almost the only one, which, as she afterwards said to Mavra Schepelof, had distracted her mind from the "load of torment"—such were her words—

which had weighed upon her throughout that day.

A woman, desiring sympathy above all things, her loneliness had never been felt so cruelly by her as on that festal occasion.

The gracious angel of dreams, carefully eschewing all the miserable thoughts and images which had embittered the Empress for those many weary hours, chose as a theme the loving aspect of the two little brothers, as they stood near to the steps of the cathedral.

In her dream the Empress wandered about beautiful gardens with her little nephew, the Czar Peter the II—the one who had come to the throne before Anne, and had died early from an attack of smallpox.

He had been five or six years younger than herself; and, with that habit of reasonable questioning, which never quite forsakes us even in sleep, she wondered how it was that he had suddenly grown so much taller than herself, as to put his arm round her neck, and how it was, too, that he seemed to take her for a boy—not

so great a mistake, as the English ambassador would have said, if he had been the dream's interpreter.

But the dream was very sweet and pleasant, for she had always been very fond of her nephew; and, at the time of his accession, had rejoiced in there being a lineal male descendant of her father, Peter the Great, to take upon himself the Empire, and to free her from the duty of being ambitious—private life being what this wisely-intellectual woman had most desired.

She was in the midst of these happy thoughts—rather feelings though than thoughts—for, all the time, even when the dream was most intense and real, she was strangely conscious that she was the Empress Elizabeth of Russia, and wondered how this had come to pass,—when she was aroused by a knock at that door which led from the grand corridor into the apartment.

She was much astonished at this, for, as she had ascended the stairs, she had given the strictest orders to the Chamberlains that she was not to be disturbed. She, however, allowed

the person who knocked at the door to enter. An elderly page, of the name of Vladimir, came in. He approached the table with some hesitation. The Empress looked at him, with a look expressing astonishment and anger. "I thought, Vladimir," she said, "that I had desired to be undisturbed. Were you not aware of this?"

"Please your Majesty, I was ; but I venture to think your Majesty will pardon me, when"—He did not finish the sentence ; but, offering the Czarina a small packet, added :—"The person who gave me this, wishes to see your Majesty ; and I did not dare to refuse to convey his message."

The Empress opened the packet. There was in it a little ring of small value. Her colour changed as she looked at this ring. Yet there was nothing very mysterious about it, no wonderful story connected with it. She had worn it, herself, when quite a girl, and when she was girlish enough to express her admiration of a beautiful sapphire ring, the first she had ever seen, which was worn by a young officer in the

household of the Empress Anne, then only the Grand Duchess of Courland. This young man had been sent by her on a confidential mission to the Court of Russia. He had playfully suggested an exchange of rings, when the princess, after admiring his, had refused to accept it. To the exchange she had consented; and he had always worn this ring upon his little finger.

There was nothing very remarkable in this story, except that the young courtier's name was John Ernest de Biron, now Duke of Courland.

The Empress did not fail to show her ready wit, and presence of mind. She divined at once that the Duke of Courland was in the Palace. She knew that he had come there without her permission, and that this step on his part might be fatal to him, if discovered by his enemies. She said to herself, "Vladimir has recognized him. He must be silenced first."

"Vladimir," she said, looking sternly at him, "you have disobeyed orders. I forgive you—

forgive you freely ; but on this condition only, that no one ever knows that you have disobeyed orders, and that this person has had audience of me. Go. Bring him, but remember that one careless word may be your ruin."

The page left the room. He soon after returned, bringing in with him the disguised Duke of Courland ; and then withdrew.

BOOK VII.



CHAPTER V.

THE DUKE OF COURLAND'S AUDIENCE.

“Is Your Highness mad?” were the first words which the Empress addressed to the Duke.

He made no answer; but knelt down and kissed the Czarina's hand. Her first thoughts, womanlike, was to see how he looked; and she was greatly astonished, almost shocked, at the change that was visible in him. “I should hardly have known him,” was what she said to herself. “You do not answer my question,” was what she uttered.

“I am not mad, Madam ; but, perhaps, I am very foolish, for I know that I come at the risk of my life to ask something which I might have asked by letter. I wished to see Your Majesty once more. I am fortunate in having come upon an auspicious day.”

“Auspicious !” exclaimed the Empress bitterly. “Auspicious—because fifteen thousand, seven hundred men clad in one colour, and twenty five thousand men clad in another colour, have died upon the field, while the comrades of the fifteen thousand, undismayed by the loss of their friends, have stood their ground ; and it is a great and glorious victory for them. ‘The God of Battles,’ so they fondly call him, has been duly thanked ; and there is, as far as I know, but one heart that is miserable at all this carnage. But what is the use of moralizing to you—a statesman like the rest of them—who think but little of the slaughter of thousands of your fellows, so that the clause of a treaty may be worded a little more favourably.”

“I am not here, Madam, to praise the policy of your ministers.”

“Ah but, Courland, they say, and say with justice, that you were equally reckless of human life. Mayhap you have thought of these things in exile?”

“I have, Madam,” replied the Duke, and these words were uttered in a melancholy tone that did not escape the Empress’s attention. The generous woman would not press him any further. The same thought came to her that had occurred to her before—a thought very near the truth—that the Duke of Courland was an altered man, greatly refined and softened by adversity.

The Duke seemed lost in thought, and there was silence for a minute or two. It was broken by a question from the Empress. “You have come to ask me something—that is why everybody comes to me; for I venture to doubt, Duke,” and here the Empress smiled, “whether the anxiety to see your Sovereign once again, was quite so potent as to cause you to run the

risk of what Bestuchef and the other members of the council would say to such a juvenile escapade."

The Duke smiled too; and said, "I am glad to see that the cares of Empire have not subdued the pleasant wit of the Princess Elizabeth, which we all used so much to delight in."

The Empress took no notice of the compliment; but simply asked:—"Is Jaroslaw so dull, so much more dull than Pelem, that the Duke of Courland cannot endure his sojourn there? Is the Governor unobservant of the Duke's dignity and pleasure? Our orders were, that he should be treated with the utmost respect. You know, Duke—no man better—that most people, even of failing memories in other respects, have long and accurate remembrance of injuries done to themselves. Without a word more, I cannot summon you to Court. Herein the statesmen are, for once, right. Your presence, otherwise most welcome to me, would endanger all my projects of conciliation. It cannot be—at any rate, not for the present."

“I know it:” replied the Duke, “much as I should have liked to have returned here, and to aid Your Majesty in Council, if such a boon might be permitted to me:—I know it cannot be.”

“You come, then, about the Duchy,” said the Empress. “This is a matter already before Our Council; and I may tell Your Highness, that there is one person in that Council who is your firm friend. Elizabeth does not forget any kindness which was shown to her when she, too, was powerless. We were always good friends, were we not, Duke?” These words, spoken in a most kindly and affectionate manner, tended greatly to reassure him.

“You would hardly think, Madam, how indifferent I am to all but your goodness in this matter of the Duchy. One must fight for one’s children’s rights; but I, myself, care no longer for power.”

“What in the world then,” said the Empress, somewhat emphatically, “does the man come here for? I might almost believe, as women are

so apt to flatter themselves, that he does come to see his Sovereign."

"That is a great pleasure to him," replied the Duke, "but the object which is still nearer to his heart is to obtain Your Majesty's pardon for Ivan de Biron and the Serbatoffs.

"Ungrateful wretches all of them!" exclaimed the Czarina. "Do you know the story of your Ivan? How he fought against me: how I forgave him: how I employed him: how I trusted him: and how he rewarded me? It was by sitting at the table of my enemies, and commenting, the traitor! upon the conduct of his mistress. Slandorous comments, Duke, abominable calumnies!

"Then the Serbatoffs. They, too, believe me Duke, were fully implicated in the Lapouschin conspiracy."

"Spies, Madam, are often incorrect in their intelligence. I ought to know that, if any man does. They must say something.

"I have been for hours waiting to gain admit-

tance here—waiting until I could find some friend in the household.”

“It would have been better, Duke, that you should not have found him.”

“Well, Madam, as I waited, I looked at the young trees in the north corner of the square. Your Majesty can see them from this window. I ordered them to be planted.”

The Empress looked impatiently at the Duke. Then it crossed her mind that his troubles might have affected his brain, so irrelevant seemed this talk about the trees. She made no remark, however, and the Duke continued.

“They were tall young trees when they were planted. We took them from Oranienbaum.”

The Empress became still more alarmed for the Duke’s reason.

“Long wooden poles were driven in beside them, to which they were attached, as you see, by an iron ring and chain. This was, at first, a most needful support. But they have now outgrown the need. No one has thought of this. The iron rings have eaten into the trees; and

will, if not at once removed, be the ruin of them."

"It shall be seen to, Duke," said the Czarina, "there is much about Our Court which requires such watchfulness as yours, ever attentive to the smallest as well as to the greatest things." This she said to soothe and please him, for she was more than ever convinced that his mind had become affected.

"Thank you, Madam; but it was not of the future of those trees that I was thinking most."

"What then?"

"I thought how those means of government which we at first employ—for an occasion when they may be needful, at length eat into the very heart of that which we seek to preserve, and become its ruin, not its support. These spies, ever present, ever active, with their endless mass of false or dubious intelligence, prove, in the end, as fatal to us, the rulers of men, as those iron rings to the stunted trees I spoke of. Your Majesty now understands me. Such were my poor thoughts ere I encountered the good-

hearted Vladimir, almost the only grateful person I have met with since my downfall."

"Your Highness," said the Czarina, "has become a great philosopher. I do not altogether deny the truth of your philosophy. My own conclusions are not far from yours as regards these same supports, which often become the greatest hindrances to sound growth. But sometimes, as you yourself admitted, they are useful to the governing powers."

"Dismiss the Empress," replied the Duke, "and let our great Elizabeth be, for the moment, the wise and witty woman of the world she used to be. Is it likely that Prince Serbatoff—that prince and paragon of courtiers—then in high favour—would connect himself with a band of obscure conspirators? Our Elizabeth, when princess, used to be a judge of character. Has the weight of the Crown Imperial dwarfed her powers of perception? Is it in the slightest degree probable that Prince Serbatoff was as guilty as your ministers choose to suppose?"

"If I am to drop the Empress, and become

the woman of the world, may I ask what makes the Duke of Courland so anxious for the welfare of the Serbatoffs? It was not so in former days, I believe?"

"No: it was not," replied the Duke. "There is much in those former days, that, if my heart's blood could cancel it, should be cancelled."

The Empress reflected silently for a short time, and then said:—"I may as well at once be candid with Your Highness. I know the cause of your solicitude for the Serbatoffs. Your Ivan loves, or did love, the Princess Marie; and she loves him."

The Duke drew back two or three paces, as if struck by a sudden blow; and then exclaimed:—"I knew nothing of this, Madam, nothing upon my soul. My regard for the Serbatoffs, my gratitude to the Princess Marie, was for myself alone. Your Majesty's spies do not tell you everything. My presence at Pelem was betrayed to the people. The wretched rabble surrounded me, and nearly tore me to pieces. By night the Princess Marie came to me, tended my

wounds, soothed me, comforted me—and, indeed, it is to her I owe my life. If, Madam, you have ever felt any kindness for me—and as you truly said, we once were friends; and long ere this, as you well know, I would have placed the crown upon your head, had it been in my power to do so—befriend these wretched exiles. They are innocent. I would stake my life on that. But whether innocent or not, use sovereign power mercifully for once,—and restore them.”

As the Duke uttered these words, a sudden pallor overspread his countenance. The Empress noticed it, rose from her own chair, brought it to him, and bade him be seated. The Duke obeyed. In truth the great fatigue he had endured in coming from Jaroslaw—some part of the journey he had walked or ridden on horseback, to avoid the questioning at the great towns—and the surprise, not unmixed with a feeling of jealousy and dismay, when he heard of the Princess Marie’s attachment to Ivan—quite overcame him.

The Empress was in agonies, fearing that it should be necessary to call for assistance, and

that all would then be betrayed. She watched him with great anxiety, until he recovered. Then she said :—" My good Courland, it shall be as you wish. They shall all be recalled—even your Ivan, though the young man is not as faithful and true as his uncle. But now, summon up your courage, and prepare for your return. For God's sake let no one ever know of your absence from Jaroslaw."

The Empress returned to the table, took another chair, and immediately wrote a short letter to the Governor of Jaroslaw, enforcing silence upon him, if he should be aware of the absence of the Duke of Courland.

It was an instance of the practical nature of this great Sovereign that she thought whether money might be necessary for him. Hastily she went to a cabinet ; took from it a number of gold pieces, and put them into his hand. He had again almost relapsed into unconsciousness. She called for Vladimir, the page ; and when the Duke had at last recovered himself and his presence of mind, she entrusted him to the care

of Vladimir, saying :—"Vladimir, you know all. You will go with him back to Jaroslaw. Here is my signet ring. This will ensure safe conduct throughout the journey. Meanwhile let no one enter." And, so saying, she left the apartment.

The Duke was in a short time sufficiently recovered to pursue his journey with Vladimir; and they reached Jaroslaw in safety. The autograph letter of the Empress secured the silence of the Governor; and this interview between the Duke of Courland and his sovereign remained a secret, known only to four persons.

BOOK VII.



CHAPTER VI.

THE EMPRESS RECALLS THE SERBATOFFS AND IVAN
DE BIRON FROM EXILE—THEIR JOURNEY TO ST.
PETERSBURG—THE CONTINUED ESTRANGEMENT OF
MARIE AND IVAN.

THE Empress saw no one more that night. She was invisible even to her favourite Mavra Schepelof. Strange to say, the depression of spirits from which she had suffered on hearing the news of the victory of her army—a victory so dearly purchased—was partly removed by the thought that, at any rate, she could do some one good work, and if she managed skilfully, could

make some few people happy. How true it is that the fate and fortunes of those who are brought close to us, affect us more than the fate and fortunes of thousands, or tens of thousands, of those who are only units of humanity, unknown to us. There never was a more fond mother of her people than the Empress Elizabeth of Russia; but this private love affair, interesting to her because she knew the persons concerned in it, served for the moment to distract her thoughts from the sufferings of that multitude of her subjects who had died on the field of battle, to enlarge her power and her renown. If, for the improvement of the world, any one thing could especially be desired, it would be that the powerful should have that sympathy for, and interest in, the distant masses of mankind—distant in station from them—which they have for those with whom they have only been brought into the slightest personal contact.

The Empress was true to her word. The Serbatoffs and Ivan de Biron were recalled from Pelem. According to private instructions from

the Empress, the exiles were conducted by the the same couriers, and attended by the same escort.

“The faithless man,” she said to herself, “shall have full opportunity of converse with that true-hearted girl, the Princess Marie.” Elizabeth, not free from the prejudices of her sex, laid all the blame upon Ivan, forgetting that it was impossible for him to conclude otherwise than that the Princess Marie had been faithless to him.

The time occupied by this journey was a very trying time both for Ivan and the Princess. Her pride, for she thought that her love was scorned, made her very cold in all her intercourse with him. His pride, for he thought that he had been most cruelly treated by her, made him equally cold to her. Prince Serbatoff bore the journey with great difficulty; and the two young people were necessarily in constant communication to provide for his comfort, and to make joint appeals to the couriers and to the escort to slacken their speed, in order to render

the sufferings of the Prince less injurious to him.

The narration of one trifling incident will do more than many words of description to convey a just impression of the terms on which Ivan and the Princess Marie were, during these painful days of travel from Pelem to St. Petersburg.

It was in the afternoon of a day during which Prince Serbatoff had shown signs of more than ordinary fatigue. The Princess Marie was much alarmed; and, at the last post-house, had, though reluctantly, communicated her alarm to Ivan. He then besought the Government couriers, and the captain of the escort to be allowed, for the next stage, to accompany the Prince in his carriage. They were at that time approaching the end of their journey, and had exchanged sledges for telegas. The principal Government courier had received instructions to deal humanely with the returning exiles; and, when made acquainted with the circumstances of the case, consented to the proposal.

During the last stage of that day which was to bring them to a large town at no great distance from St. Petersburg (it was most probably Josna) the Prince was certainly far more feeble than usual. In order to give him more ease of posture, Ivan and the Princess persuaded him to recline. In this position they had to support him; and, in doing so, their hands accidentally met. Each of them simultaneously withdrew the hand, as if it had touched the hand of an enemy. The poor Prince made an exclamation of pain from this sudden withdrawal of support. The telega, being a very rough mode of conveyance, exposed him to a somewhat severe jolting. They both felt ashamed. They joined hands to ensure the prevention of a similar accident; but there was no fond pressure of the hands; and two servants, dutifully taking care of a master, could not have manifested more indifference for each other than did these two ardent lovers, for such they were, who clasped hands so firmly, but so unaffectionately. Each, too, avoided looking at the other; and each, with settled pride of

heart, took care to make it understood by the other, that solicitude for the Prince was not to be made into a pretext for any friendly proximity, moral or physical, on the part of his supporters.

It was in the course of that stage, that they were witnesses of one of the most beautiful of any of Nature's multiform phenomena—an aspect of Nature which it is given to few people to behold. The cavalcade was entering a mountain gorge. On the right hand, and on the left, the mountains descended towards the road which they had to traverse. It had been raining previously for the last hour, and was raining still upon the sides of the mountains. But bright sunshine had come forth and illumined the whole of the long level road they had to travel. Then there appeared a perfect rainbow. Over all the roadway, in its central part, it was but an ordinary rainbow. On the sides of the mountains which enclosed the travellers, it was of gigantic extent; and it took in whole forests, from the base of the mountains to their summits, which it

transformed into masses of red, yellow, and violet trees,

The escort involuntarily stopped ; and, silently, each person regarded with wonder, and with somewhat of superstitious awe, this grand spectacle, which was new to every one of them.

The Prince himself forgot his pain and his fatigue ; withdrew from the support of Ivan and his Marie, and looked on as wonderingly as the rest of them. In a few minutes the rainbow vanished as suddenly as it had appeared ; and the harsh voice of the government courier was heard, urging on the drivers to movement. The stern official was somewhat ashamed of himself for having allowed this brief interruption to their journey, for which there was no government authority.

Meanwhile, what were the thoughts of Ivan and the Princess Marie ? Each thought how this brilliant phenomenon, and the gloom which followed it, told forth the sad story of their own lives.

There was their first love mirrored in all the

brilliancy and in all the joy which made every aspect of nature beautiful for each of them. Then there was the sudden gloom which overspread all nature, and all life, when this transitory and vehement beauty had vanished. Each of them wished to sigh; but each suppressed the sigh, fearing that it might tell the other too much of sorrow and regret, and might betray those feelings which wounded pride forbade each to disclose.

The Prince sank back in the telega, and was again supported by the intertwined hands of his affectionate young friend and his loving daughter. But those hands, though they trembled, apparently under the weight of the good old Prince, did not betray to their owners the sadness and the desolation which were so well figured forth to each of them, by the sudden vanishing of the brilliant and rare phenomenon which had, for so short a time, gladdened the beholders.

Ivan could not but admire the skilful tenderness of the Princess in regard to everything that concerned her father; and found himself often

considering what an admirable wife such a tender daughter would prove, if, as he said to himself, the proud girl could love any one who was not dignified by long descent, and enriched by large possessions. But, as regards love, he had come to the firm conclusion that her love was of that well-ordered kind which requires station and riches to be added to the object of its affection, before it can condescend to be evoked. He said to himself, rather wittily, but very unjustly : “ As in a good coat of arms there must be proper supporters ; so, for the Princess Marie’s love, there must stand on one side an heraldic animal, signifying rank, and, on the other side, another animal supporter signifying wealth.”

Of all the errors that beset mankind, perhaps the greatest is, that most people imagine that others know what they know ; and are thinking or acting in accordance with that knowledge. How great was this error in the present case ! Ivan condemned Marie, unconsciously assuming that she should have known that he had put aside for ever his transient love, as he was pleased

to call it, for the great singer Azra. The Princess Marie, on the other hand, unconsciously assumed that Ivan should know (how could his direct and honest nature imagine such a thing?) that she had only promoted his suit to Azra, from the highest motives, having come to the sad conclusion that their love (her own and his) was hopeless, and that she had but striven to gain for him some true love which it was denied for her, alas! to give. "He ought to have seen how much I suffered in giving him up," she said to herself, "but men are so stupid."

Therein she was right; but how can it be expected that we denser mortals, perhaps more given to hard truth and distinctness than the other sex, can imagine all the delicacy, the depth of feeling, and the profoundness of self-sacrifice, of which that other sex is capable?

The benevolent intentions of the Empress were not successful; and this journey did not result in bringing the two lovers more in harmony together. It did result, though, in making each admire the other more, and more regret the

hopelessness, in each case, of their affection. Ivan said to himself, "She is more loveable to me than ever; but further removed from me than ever." The Princess said to herself, "Ivan is even a greater man than I thought; but he is less my own than ever. I fear him more than I did. There is a certain darkness which has overspread his character; and I am consoled in thinking, though it is a bitter and a wicked consolation, that he will never love any woman, having, as I can see, such a profound contempt for all of us."

It was with such mistaken thoughts that they arrived at St. Petersburg.

As for the Prince, skilful as he was in diplomacy, and much as he had made it his business to master the characters of those he came in contact with, he could not understand either of these young persons. It was in vain that he praised each to the other. There was no response, or at best a very cold one; and he came to the conclusion, a very unwelcome one to most persons of his age, that he did not

understand the young people of the present time. The truth is, he had begun to wish that Ivan were his son-in-law. "It is very degrading, no doubt," he said to himself, "that a Serbatoff should desire to ally himself to an upstart Biron." But the good Prince was, after all, one of those persons who only use their diplomacy in reference to other people, and are true to themselves; and at last, he could not but acknowledge that he heartily, however degradingly, wished that these two young people would have the goodness, if only out of regard to him, to love one another, and become united in matrimony.

It would be unjust to the worldly training and principles of the Prince to say that no worldliness entered into these views. He reasoned thus:—There must be something very taking in Ivan, something appreciated by the Empress, for him to be recalled a second time from exile. "With my knowledge of Courts, and my skill in diplomacy, (and he is not above being taught by me) he might rise to the highest station

in the State." It seemed to the veteran statesman that, having no hopes or expectations, with regard to his own advancement, he could throw all his energy, and all his skill, into making a worthy pupil, and in some sort a successor to himself, of his dear young friend, Ivan de Biron.

BOOK VII.



CHAPTER VII.

THE EMPRESS SENDS FOR IVAN—THE INTERVIEW—
IVAN FINALLY RE-INSTATED IN THE EMPRESS'S
FAVOUR.

THE Empress was impatient for the arrival of the Serbatoffs and Ivan. She had in her mind a whole drama to play, and was scarcely less interested in it than she had been in the intrigues of Lestocq and La Chétardie, when they were about to gain for her the Empire. Then she had been tortured by remorseful doubts, and by anxious apprehensions. Now,

whatever might be the result, there was no doubt or danger for herself.

After much thought she determined to send for Ivan first. It was for him, though, that she felt the least liking; and, if it had been his welfare alone that was at stake, she could hardly have taken much interest in the matter.

On the second day after his arrival, Ivan was sent for to the Palace.

Never was Elizabeth of Russia more resolved than on this occasion to conduct herself with the coldness and haughtiness of a Sovereign who had been deeply injured by the base ingratitude of an inferior.

Ivan had scarcely entered the room before she addressed him with these forbidding words.

“We have sent for you, Sir, because we wish that you should know that it is not from any merits or deserts of your own, that we have recalled you from an exile which was so justly your due. Your uncle has pleaded for you. My regard for his Highness has induced me to

listen to his request, and, for the moment, to put aside the baseness of the person for whom he has made that request. On his account, we would even do more than that. We in high place are not always wise or circumspect in our likings; and we doubt not that you have deceived him, as you deceived us. You visited the Lapouschins, did you not?"

"I did, please Your Majesty," replied Ivan.

"You were present at those dinners where our conduct was so unjustly and traitorously impugned; and not one word did you, our faithful servitor, a member of our household, ennobled* by us, urge in answer to those calumnies directed against Our Imperial person. Was it not so?"

"Yes, Madam."

*It seems strange that the Empress never addressed him by his title of 'Baron,' but it is probable that she held that his nobility had been cancelled by his condemnation to exile as a traitor. One of the first things that an accused person seems to have suffered was to have his orders (if he had any) torn from his breast.

“It seems as if you held those calumnies to be true. Is it so?”

Ivan was standing near to the table at which the Empress was sitting, and in front of it, where she had motioned him to stand. On hearing this question, which, doubtless, she expected him to answer in the negative, he looked, not at her, but over her, towards the window which commanded the great square.

The Czarina, not unused to avail herself of all possible advantages in an interview, had placed herself in shadow, and the “traitorous Ivan” as she named him to herself, in full light.

On hearing Her Majesty's last question, it seemed to him as if a similar danger had come upon him, as that which he had encountered long ago, when his master, the Duke of Courland, questioned him as to his conduct as Prime Minister of Russia.

Ivan said to himself, “If I die for it, I will not speak falsely.”

“Ivan Ivanovitch:”* said the Empress, “there is no inspiration to be found where you are looking for it. If the great duke were by your side, not even his practised skill as a courtier could suggest a judicious answer foreign from the truth. Say at once. ‘I am a young man: I had not the courage to contradict those pleasant friends. Gratitude is feeble when it has to contend with the sayings of a wicked merry set of people, my companions and my elders. What is friendship, what is duty, when compared with the wish to please the present company? We must go with the stream, though it should drag down all those whom we are most bound to honour and to serve.’”

“No, Madam: No. ‘Ivan Ivanovitch,’ as you call him, fears not the ridicule of living man or woman; but he said nothing in answer to these

* The Czarina made a singular mistake in so naming him. The Duke of Courland’s name was also John (or Ivan); and she for the moment, seemed to assume that the Duke was Ivan de Biron’s father.

spiteful people, because he feared to provoke their further spitefulness. He thought, indeed he knew, that much of what they said was true."

As he uttered these bold words, he turned to the Empress, and looked at her. It was her turn to be embarrassed now; and the great lady, much unused to blushing, blushed and shivered slightly. She did not meet his steadfast gaze, but looked down upon the ground.

The kind-hearted Ivan repented him of what he had said. Suddenly he advanced towards her, knelt at her feet, and took her hand. "Great Sovereign," he said, "for indeed you are a great sovereign, you would have the truth, and I have told it. You may condemn me to death; but can you ever forgive me? It is a little thing to say; but, at that moment, when those unkind and wicked people were speaking insolently of Your Majesty, could my death have stayed their talk, I would have given my life to stay it. And, Madam, it would have been no great sacrifice: for what is life to me!"

The Empress had conquered her first feeling

of wrath. He still held her left hand as he knelt before her. Almost unconscious of what she was doing, she laid her right hand for a moment or two upon his head. Many thoughts passed through her mind while she did so. Here was a true man: how different a man from any of her transient and unworthy lovers! What would it not have been to have gained the love of this man! She felt as if she could have loved such a one, if only for his truthfulness. And then she thought, for this great woman was one of the most unselfish of womankind, of his private misery, which now was not unknown to her.

“Rise, Ivan,” she said, “do not condemn me. There is nothing worth living for, as I often say, but love; and even the semblance of it has been very dear, too dear, to me. I forgive you for what you have said. The water-carriers in the streets say the same, I doubt not. But should you have said it?”

“No,” replied Ivan softly.

The Empress was silent for a few moments. She strove to dismiss entirely her own mortifica-

tion from her mind, and to think only of how she could best weave into some happy form the tangled skeins of Ivan and the Princess Marie's love, which lay before her. She thus began.

"You men are great fools, Ivan Ivanovitch; and in the greatest affairs the greatest fools. You know the Princess Marie Serbatoff?"

Ivan drew himself up proudly, and answered: "Yes, Madam, I have that honour."

"We hardly know," continued the Empress, smiling, "why we should speak of her. But the story of the girl's life might interest you. You travelled with her, we believe, from Pelem?"

"Yes, Madam."

"Well: she had been in exile before. There was a youth, somewhat obscure at that time, and, not from his obscurity alone, unworthy of her love. But the maiden loved him. The hearts of maidens are not directed by the dictates of pure reason. Sir, a more true-hearted girl than this Princess lives not in the world. She saw, or thought she saw, that this love of hers could

come to no good result for the man she loved. Her father and a near kinsman of her lover's were deadly enemies. Then, (could you but imagine the fond devotion of us women, but this is far from you) she thought she could secure his happiness by another love : that of some actress, if I mistake not. The Princess thought, and, poor girl, was not greatly in error there, that the loves of men are somewhat transferable. And so it proved. It is now your turn, Ivan Ivanovitch, to look down upon the ground, and to feel some of the shame which, hard-hearted man, you have just made another feel."

After a moment, Ivan said : "Your Majesty's quick wit was well known to me ; but I had not hitherto been favoured by hearing a love story from the Czarina's lips. Perhaps you thought that such stories would not be relished by one whom, in happier days, you were wont to call 'your serious scholar.' If I may venture to say so, the story smacks somewhat of fable."

"By God, Sir !" (The daughter of Peter the Great was wont to use some of the strong

language of her father) "by God, Sir! it is all true. It may be from our own knowledge of our own sex, that We have told more of the maiden's feelings than the evidence before us strictly warrants; but what We have said, We feel, We know, to be true. The poets and the dramatists fable of us who tread the heights of this world. They are pleased to enlighten mankind about our inmost thoughts and feelings; and, sometimes, even they are right; but my intelligence is sure—bare facts with nothing of dramatic skill thrown in to weave a pretty story. That smile of yours is still the protest of an unbeliever. On this day week come hither at this same hour of the day, when further assurance shall be given to you. But stay: supposing that the story be no fable, what think you should be the feelings of the recreant lover?"

"If I know anything of him, Madam, they would be those of utter devotion to the maiden whom he first courted in the wood of Pelem."

"We said nothing, Sir, about a wood. Who is it now that is adding circumstances, false

mayhap, to Our simple story? If you know the young man, Ivan, tell him from me, that the most precious thing this world has to give is the real love of such a maiden as this heroine of my story.

“Have you nothing to ask? It seems We have given audience to a phantom—not to a human being—when nothing is asked of Us. We must, then, ask for you thus :

“‘Gracious Madam, I listened silently to bitter censure of your conduct: I—a member of your household, and somewhat, perhaps, indebted to you—listened silently because I felt that the censure was just; and, having told you this, I wish to be re-instated in your household, and think I have abundant claim to be so.’ That is what you should say, did not some foolish touch of modesty prevent you.

“To the which saying, We reply. ‘Your great deserts are recognised.’ Nay, without further jesting, Ivan de Biron, a place shall be found for my good, honest, ‘serious scholar.’”

Ivan knelt and kissed the Empress’s hand.

She added. "Our Chancellor tells us daily that our Treasury is lean and poverty-stricken. Poorer it will still become if we are to bestow the offices of exiles upon new men ; and, afterwards, are to find new offices for exiles on their return. Even wealthy Britain could hardly bear such demands upon her Treasury ; but for once it must be so. You are again Our *faithful* servant."

The love of polished sarcasm which was inherent in this great Princess made her accentuate the word 'faithful;' but her looks were most kind and encouraging. She slightly bowed, signifying that the audience was over, and Ivan de Biron accordingly withdrew.

BOOK VII.



CHAPTER VIII.

THE EMPRESS'S PLAN FOR THE WELFARE OF IVAN DE
BIRON AND THE PRINCESS MARIE—THE EMPRESS.
SENDS FOR NARISKOFF.

THE Empress Elizabeth's education had been of a very uncertain and scrambling kind. She had been taught several languages ; she had acquired several accomplishments : but her course of reading had been very much left to herself. She had read many of the tragedies and comedies written in that age ; and in them, as a regular rule, were to be found some persons of inferior station in whom the hero and heroine un-

reservedly confided. The Czarina believed that this was the natural course of things; and indeed it is probable that people in those days did confide much more to their inferiors in station, and certainly talked much more openly of their loves and their hatreds, than any persons, in this reserved age, are wont to do.

The Empress had naturally conjectured that there must be people at Pelem who would be cognizant of all those matters of which she was anxious to be informed, in order to fulfil her benevolent intentions towards the two lovers. She had accordingly given orders that any especial friend of the Princess Marie, or of Ivan de Biron, should be sent back to St. Petersburg, not in their company, but as shortly afterwards as might be.

The authorities at Pelem had not been able to ascertain that the Princess had any friend; but there was no doubt that Ivan de Biron had an intimate friend in Nariskoff, and he was therefore sent to St. Petersburg, to await the orders of the Empress.

In the course of the week that was to elapse between the interview which the Empress had given to Ivan and the succeeding interview which she had promised to him, she sent for this man Nariskoff. She was well aware of his reputation for satire, and was, on that account, by no means favourably disposed towards him.

Nariskoff himself was in high glee at being thus sent for; and, with his usual conceit, was quite prepared to give the Empress whatever benefit as regards State affairs was to be derived from his superior wisdom.

The Empress received him very coldly; and, with her usual abruptness, led at once to the subject of the interview.

“You have long been acquainted, Sir, with Ivan de Biron, an exile who has lately been recalled from Pelem. I am desirous of knowing anything you can tell me of this young man’s character and conduct.”

“He is a man of moderate abilities, please Your Majesty, but honest, and capable of taking good advice. I have myself often instructed him

as regards his conduct to Your Majesty. I can answer for his faith and honesty as I could for my own."

"Sir; if you can do no more than that, your testimony is of little value to him. We know you well; we are fully informed of the gracious and truthful sayings, as regards ourselves, with which you were wont to repay the company at Madame Lapouschin's, for your entertainment there."

Nariskoff's sagacity was not to be found at fault on an occasion like the present. He could be as truthful, from policy, as Ivan was from the innate and supreme honesty of his character. Nariskoff had the audacity thus to reply. "Madam, if it had been the Czarina's fate, as it has been mine, to live upon her wits for many a year, she would not have been scrupulous as to what she said of friend or foe, so that she found her sayings gained favour with those who fed and clothed her. We people of superior wit, when Fortune has not been kind to us, must live upon the follies of our weaker brethren."

The Empress paused for a moment, hesitating whether she should be indignant at the presumption of the man, or take his bold speech in a lighter spirit. The latter alternative prevailed, and she indulged in an outburst of laughter. "I have been witness of some audacity in my time," she said, "but none like that of yours, my friend. Treason then is a jest—the duty to one's sovereign to be postponed to any opportunity of causing laughter in a company of traitors?"

"I did not say that, please Your Majesty; I only intimated that one must live, and not be too scrupulous as to the mode of gaining one's living."

"Keep to the subject for which We sent for you, Sir. We wish to know more about your friend and companion, Ivan de Biron."

"Well, Madam, he is a good youth with a somewhat warped and bewildered mind. He is insane enough at times to speak evil things, even against women."

"Ourselves for instance!" said the Empress sharply.

Nariskoff acted as the confidant in a play, fulfilling the character which Elizabeth had imagined for him; and, accordingly, after some doubt as to whether truth or falsehood would be most expedient, adopted the common form, and lied: "Oh! no, madam, Ivan never ventured to speak ill of Your Majesty. The Czarina was an exception to all other women."

"This is a falsehood, Sir: your hesitation showed it to be so. And if the true-hearted young man were here, he would own that, in his conversations with you, when he spoke against women in general, Elizabeth of Russia was by no means a distinguished exception."

Nariskoff, with his ready tact, appreciated at once the necessities of his position, and resolved to tell no more falsehoods. "I cannot say, Madam, now that you have quickened my memory, that even his Empress was entirely exempted from blame."

"We now, Sir, understand one another better," said the Empress. "When men talk this idle talk about their hatred for all women, it

merely means, that there is some one woman whom they love very much; but who does not seem fully to appreciate their especial merits. Is it not so? We see you are a humourist, and one who knows somewhat of human life, and of the strange ways of human beings. We have but little time for further converse; and We would hear forthwith, in the fewest words, what you can tell us. You know the Princess Marie Andréevna Serbatoff; she was also at Pelem?"

Nariskoff replied, not without his accustomed conceit:—"Your Majesty, and my poor self, are persons of the world. I could have wished that we had been earlier acquainted with one another."

The Empress again laughed heartily. "Go on, man," she said, "I have seldom met with one so largely endowed with impudence; but he who can give intelligence of any kind, must give it in his own way, and is, for the moment, the superior. We await, respectfully, for whatever information you may be pleased to give us."

“Ivan is a learned man, Madam ; but learning does not go far to instruct us when we are in that state of mind in which all the wisdom of the world is valueless. He thinks he does not love the Princess Marie, but he has never ceased to love her. I divine this from the fact, that he always spoke more bitterly of her than of any other woman, Your gracious Majesty not excepted. And she loves him. And they are two simple fools wandering about, blindfold, in a maze, and not likely ever to meet, or to understand one another, unless some sensible person, such as Your Majesty or myself, should bring their two foolish selves together, and take off the bandages from their eyes.”

Nariskoff thought that he might now say a word or two for himself, on his own interests. He had no idea of sinking the character of suitor in that of witness. He availed himself of an opportunity of silence, while the Czarina was reflecting what question she should ask him next.

“There is no greater proof of wisdom in a

man, please Your Majesty, than that he should know his own value. When you find that a man is unsuccessful, it is merely that he has not understood his own value, or has not understood it early enough, or has not, from the denseness of those around him, been able to persuade them of this value in himself. That latter difficulty has at length been removed from me, now that I have met with a great personage who can understand my merits."

"Yes," said the Empress, "you would make an admirable spy."

"Spy is a hard word, Madam. Would you allow me to substitute the phrase 'observant philosopher'?"

"So be it then," replied the Empress: "words are of little moment. I say, then, that you would make an admirable 'observant philosopher.'"

"I ever saw, Madam, that these Lapouschins were hastening to destruction: but what could I do? They were the only people who fed me. Has Your Majesty ever been hungry for a whole day long?"

"We cannot say, Sir, that we have had that experience, so necessary, it appears, to the making of an 'observant philosopher.'"

"That Madame Lapouschin—I never liked her—deserved the fate she met with."

"Base man, wretch—ungrateful villain!" exclaimed the Empress, starting from her chair. "She did *not* deserve it. Oh! my God," she muttered, as she walked up and down the room in a transport of anguish; "is this for ever to come up against me?" Then, recollecting herself, and considering how she must never own, at least to such a man, that her government had been in any instance wrong, she added hastily, "Yes, yes, she did deserve it; but you will understand, Sir, that one woman's heart bleeds for another's torments; and her death was never intended. But what is it that We were speaking about?"

The Empress, in her agony of remorse, had really forgotten the subject of the interview; and it was with difficulty that she brought back her mind to the matter at issue. Then she ex-

claimed :—" This Ivan, and the Princess Marie : how know you, Sir, that this early and immature attachment still prevails ? "

Nariskoff, whom this outburst had greatly frightened, replied, in somewhat hesitating words :—" All other persons wear their hearts inside their garments ; but lovers on their outward breasts ; and every man of sense can read what these hearts tell him. I had many walks in the wood at Pelem ; (Pelem, Your Majesty, is not the loveliest spot on this Earth's surface ;) and both the Princess and this innocent youth are as fond of one another as—"

" You need not finish your sentence, Sir : We care not for fine-drawn similes. Suffice it to say, they love as two such noble hearts must love. I should not, however, have thought that the delicate Princess would have chosen for her confidant such an ' observant philosopher ' as yourself."

" Nor did she, Madam. But I, myself, have been in love ere now. Base as I am ; ' wretch,'

as Your Majesty was pleased to call me, I have not always been so."

"Forgive me ; Sir. You knew not how nearly you touched Us, when you spoke of the fate of Madame Lapouschin."

Poor Nariskoff was greatly moved. The recollection of his former days came back upon him. "Yes, Madam ;" he exclaimed, and tears rolled down his cheeks while he uttered these words, "I was not once a 'wretch.' I was rich : I had serfs : I was a philanthropist and a fool."

The Empress was silent while she recalled to her mind the information which she had ordered to be given to her of Nariskoff's former life and circumstances. Then, advancing towards him, she said with that gracious manner which no one could more aptly and suddenly evoke:—"Yes, we know it all, and there is a kindred feeling between us. I, too, feel for these serfs, and the day will come—" Here she stopped abruptly. "You shall be cared for. Put aside the thought for yourself, for your own fortunes, and be the man you once were. It shall not be said that in

Elizabeth's reign a man shall suffer for having the same designs that are her own. But silence about that."

The Empress made a great effort to recover her composure, and to turn the conversation into other channels. She added:—"The Princess Marie is still very beautiful, is she not?"

Nariskoff, with a foolish notion that he had, that it was not advisable to praise one woman's beauty to another, replied:—"Well, for a slender woman she is passable, but I would not, myself, trust to those straight eyebrows, and those eyes which can look so fiercely. Ivan, however, is a youth who can hold his own. There will be battles, and no one can say who will be the victor."

The Empress smiled, and said: "In such a contest, not even your sagacity, Sir, can tell what will be the result. It is enough: you may go; and take care that not a word of what you have said to Us be known to the Princess Marie, or to Ivan de Biron."

Nariskoff was about to withdraw, when the

Empress retained him with a sign, and asked him the following question.

“That actress?”

Nariskoff merely shook his head, and said: “Nothing in that, Your Majesty. We affectionate souls must think we are loving somebody; and from the greatest we decline to the lowest, by way of contrast.”

“Not the lowest, Sir: a nobler person than our prima donna does not live.” The Empress signed to Nariskoff to withdraw, and then uttered these words: “Not only the nobler but the wiser of the two; and would that I could follow her example, and love the art of kingcraft more than any of these men, so unworthy of my love. ‘She is the greatest who least condescends to them.’”

Thus did this great Empress contradict her former sayings, in which she had placed love as the highest boon of life.

BOOK VII.



CHAPTER IX.

THE SERBATOFFS, IVAN, AZRA, AND NARISKOFF ARE ORDERED TO ASSEMBLE IN THE STATE ROOM OF THE WINTER PALACE—THE OBJECT OF THE EMPRESS IN THUS ASSEMBLING THEM—ITS FAILURE.

IN a week's time after the interview between the Empress and Ivan de Biron, there were assembled in a State Room of the Winter-Palace, several persons who did not seem to be in very pleasant relation to one another. This room was very large and very gorgeously furnished; but it had that cold look which such great rooms for reception mostly have, and

which no splendour of decoration can remove. The want of constant habitation makes itself felt in the State rooms of Palaces, as in the parlours of those houses in which the family do not live, but only receive company.

Prince Serbatoff and his daughter were there, as also Ivan de Biron, Nariskoff and Azra. They stood, for the greater part of the time, in two separate groups. The Prince and his daughter were stationed near one window of the room ; Ivan de Biron and Nariskoff at another ; while Azra, occasionally moved from one party to another.

There was also another person in the room, a stranger to them all, who never spoke to any of them. He was dressed entirely in black ; and various conjectures were made by each of the other persons as to the object of his presence there. The Prince thought he was a spy ; and accordingly took care to utter nothing but the most trivial remarks, and even made them for the most part in a whisper. The Princess Marie and Nariskoff thought that he was an officer of

the Household, stationed there on all occasions of reception. Ivan thought he was some secretary; and was confirmed in that thought by observing that this man stood near a little table on which there were the materials for writing. Ivan concluded that there were certain formalities to be gone through when men of note were recalled from exile; and that the man in black was the proper officer to record such proceedings.

True it was, as he said to himself, that there had been nothing of the kind on my first recall, "but then I was so insignificant, and doubtless this ceremony is chiefly for the Prince."

Azra, from her familiarity with certain situations on the stage, rightly conjectured who this man was, but did not impart her conjecture to the rest of the company. The meeting between her and Ivan had not been without embarrassment—especially on his part; but, upon the whole, it had not been unfriendly, though somewhat constrained and cold.

On their entrance into the room, and they had all arrived about the same time, the usual

greetings had taken place. Ivan had inquired after the health of his late fellow-travellers; and they had courteously expressed, (the Prince with much warmth, the Princess with nothing warmer than courtesy demanded) their great obligations to him for his kind attentions throughout the journey from Pelem to St. Petersburg. There then ensued a considerable period of waiting, which was felt to be very awkward by all the persons present. Evening began to come on, and the large grand room to look somewhat gloomy.

During this time of waiting, one thought crossed the minds of all the persons present who had known Nariskoff. There was a change in him—something almost indefinable, but yet a very distinct and assured change. It was not that his dress was far less careless than usual, but the manner and the bearing of the man had altered. There was an absence of that recklessness and flippancy which had, for many years, been characteristic of him. They did not know what effect a gleam of good fortune is capable of

producing on such a mind. Prosperity and adversity make great changes—in the long run, equal changes ; but very different in point of rapidity. Adversity gnaws away at the character, altering it gradually, but surely. The Heaven of Prosperity makes most men fit to enter it at once.

The two persons in the room who were the least embarrassed, were Nariskoff and Azra ; and they talked together occasionally with something like ease and pleasure in their conversation.

Suddenly there was a rustling noise heard in the corridor ; and the Empress Elizabeth entered, preceded by two chamberlains and followed by Mavra Schepelof and another lady in waiting. The Empress was magnificently attired, for she had just come from another reception, that of the new Austrian Ambassador. This had made her much later than she intended to have been ; and, judging from her countenance, the reception had not been a particularly pleasant one. There were subjects of discussion at that time between the two Courts, not by any

means of a friendly nature, which had been alluded to in the course of the interview with the Ambassador.

The Empress had entered the room with even more than her usual rapidity of movement, which, as is well known, always caused great difficulty to those who had to precede and follow her, in managing their pace with proper dignity, and yet with the requisite speed.*

She bowed slightly in answer to the somewhat elaborate genuflections of the occupants of the room; uttered a few words which were indistinctly heard, mentioning the cause of her detention; and then went at once to the window near which Prince Serbatoff was standing. The Princess Marie, who was by his side, immediately withdrew to a short distance. The Empress remained for a few minutes in earnest conversation with the Prince. This was carried on

* Marshal Münnich says :—*Pleine de santé et de vivacité, elle marchoit d'un pas si leste, que les dames surtout avoient de la peine à la suivre.*

in subdued tones ; and the other persons in the room could only discern, from the Prince's looks and gestures, that what the Empress said, caused him, at first, great astonishment, and then apparently great pleasure.

Leaving him, the Empress strode to the table near which the man in black was standing. She then beckoned the Princess Marie and Ivan to come near to her. They obeyed : when at once, without any further preliminaries, the Czarina said loudly and distinctly. "My children, We know your great affection for each other—an affection long tried, and somewhat sorely tried, (here she smiled graciously) by faults and mistakes on each side—the man of course being most in fault. But now these follies are over, happily over, and We intend to give ourselves the pleasure of witnessing the civil contract of marriage between Baron Ivan de Biron and the Princess Marie Andréevna Serbatoff. You will, first, Sir," said she, turning to the notary, "state the consent of his Highness the Duke of Cour-land (thereupon she handed the notary a paper),

Ivan de Biron's uncle, and that of Prince Serbatoff, the Princess Marie's father, to this contract. Ourselves and Mavra Schepelof will be the witnesses."

Despotic sovereigns live sometimes in a strange world of their own, and may have but little knowledge of the world outside those sacred precincts. But, then, such sovereigns have generally been born in the purple and to the purple, whereas Elizabeth of Russia had passed a large part of her life in comparative freedom from sovereignty, or the hope of sovereignty.

This strange and abrupt proceeding, therefore, of hers was a great astonishment to all who were witnesses of it, or who afterwards heard of it. Every one, cognizant of the circumstances, would have expected that the Empress, having graciously made this marriage an object very dear to her, and having conducted the previous negotiations, if so they may be called, with much feminine skill and tact, would have adopted some artistic plan for the conclusion of

the affair. It might have been only the common one of making one lover confess his or her love, while the other was concealed to hear the confession. Mavra Schepelof had indeed suggested some such plan; but the Czarina had indignantly put it aside. The Empress's father Peter the Great, had insisted upon unwilling marriages being made,—so had her aunt, the Empress Anne. It was too ridiculous to suppose that she, the Czarina, could not make one which was ardently desired by both the persons concerned, as she well knew. “We will have no more of this nonsense, Mavra,” she had said: “not even in Marivaux's provoking novels have two lovers gone through more varieties of ill-fortune, before the end of the third volume, than these two children have.”

If the by-standers, and those who afterwards heard the story, were astonished at this strange proceeding so devoid of tact, much more astonished were those two persons who were directly interested. And not only astonished, but disgusted. Each thought that this was a

plan made without the knowledge of the other, to effect a union which was not acceptable to that other. The pride and generosity of each of them rose indignantly to repel such an unwelcome and enforced conclusion. The Empress turned from one to the other; and could not fail to see in their countenances the most marked signs of disapproval, and even of determined refusal.

“Come forward,” she said, imperiously, to both of them. Ivan did not move; but the Princess did approach the Empress; and, in low and faltering accents, implored Her Majesty to desist from her design. The Princess then rose, and retired to the place where she had previously been standing. Ivan then approached, and, kneeling to the Empress, urged a similar request. “Anything but this, Madam,” he said. “I am your servant, indebted to you for life and liberty and fortune; but spare me this humiliation.”

The Empress turned from him abruptly, leaving him still kneeling.

The urgent, weighty, resounding wave of despotism, like its prototype, breaks upon the shore, reducing almost all the bodies it meets with to smoothness and roundness; but there are some few natures, as there are some few crystals, of such hardness, that they retain somewhat of their original angularity even under the constant action of this imperious and almost all-subduing wave. Ivan and the Princess Marie were of this nature; and no peril of despotic wrath could make them behave untruly to themselves.

The peril, in sooth, was great. The Empress paced rapidly up and down the long apartment; and, to Nariskoff's imaginative mind, as he afterwards said, she was like a ship of war passing up and down some broad estuary in an enemy's country, and firing terrible missiles on either side.

The simile was not altogether inappropriate; for, as the Empress paced the room, whenever she approached one of the reluctant persons, she addressed to them some hard, indignant, and

fragmentary speech ; sometimes in words apparently irrelevant, but which were well understood by Ivan and the Princess Marie.

To Ivan, she said, in one of these fiery outbursts : “ You may well say that the world is a mass of ill-digested folly : ” and again. “ You look as foolishly self-conscious and unhappy as an ill-dressed woman at a feast.”

To the Princess Marie, she said : “ What has been the use of all your childish comedy —providing, forsooth, another love for him ? Is this silly play to have no fifth act ? ” And again, “ You are mad, child ; and it is a madness that will end in nothing but misery for you.”

Once the Empress stopped suddenly in her impetuous movement ; beckoned Mavra to come to her ; and sent her for the captain of the guard. That judicious lady obeyed her imperious mistress ; but took as long a time as she dared to take, in doing so ; and when she returned in company with that important and much dreaded officer, he stood at the entrance

of the door, but did not receive any orders from Her Majesty.

By that time the Empress had become aware of the absurdity of the scene. Her outbursts of rage were generally as brief as they were violent ; and her main idea now was to see how she could, with least loss of dignity, put an end to these infructuous proceedings. She made no more indignant comments to Ivan, or to the Princess Marie. She even forced herself to treat the matter jestingly ; and smiling said, half gaily, but with a certain bitterness accompanying the forced gaiety, " You may go, you may all go. Our time is too precious to be wasted upon fools."

They all began to troop off in an embarrassed and dejected manner. No one but the old courtier, Prince Serbatoff, attempted to say another word to her ; and, as he approached to do so, she waved him off, merely saying. " It seems, Prince, that filial duty has little influence in your family ! "

Nariskoff, who had meant to say his say, and

would have said it, if he had not in these few days become a much more prudent, if not a wiser man, observing the rebuff given to the Prince, judiciously refrained, and went his way in silence.

The only person whom the Empress retained for a minute or two, was Azra ; and to her she said with some severity of tone ; “Are you sure you have not deceived us ?”

“I am sure, Madam,” was Azra’s reply, “more sure than ever, to-day.” She also, bowing, then withdrew.

The Empress looked round ; and then signified to her chamberlains, and to all the others, with the exception of Mavra Schepelof, that their duties for the day were ended. Putting her arm round Mavra she said in a melancholy tone. “You are very wise, Mavra. I wonder you consent to live with such a weak-minded person as I am. The wisdom of wisdom is to understand fools ; and I can see that you can do that far better than I can. You were right. There should have been some pretty ending for this

play. We should have taken a lesson from the mimic queen, Azra.”

So saying, she went from the state room to her private apartments, secretly determined never again to meddle with other people’s love affairs.

The only further step which the Empress took, was to send a messenger to the Duke of Courland at Jaroslaw, informing him of the ill-success of her endeavour to promote the marriage of his nephew with the Princess Marie Andréevna.

It would be looking too curiously into a human heart to say, whether the Duke felt more pain, or pleasure, at this announcement. The baser motives have, for a time, great power even over the noblest minds. The Duke had come to a conclusion, in which he was entirely wrong, that the Princess Marie had served and succoured him, only from the love which she bore to Ivan—a love first made known to His Highness in his secret interview with the Czarina. The Duke’s consent to the marriage, which had been requested by the Empress, in previous corre-

spondence with him, had not been given without some pangs of regret. Still he was a wise man, and had by this time learnt to accommodate himself to what was inevitable. Moreover, he said to himself. "Better with Ivan than with anybody else; and I can bear it better. He is very loveable. There is a likeness, too, between us which she must have seen."

So the Duke gave his consent; but it is to be feared that he bore with great equanimity the ill-success of the Empress in this matter; and, perhaps, it might not be too much to say, that he felt it was a kind of reprieve, giving him time to reconcile himself to that which he thought must happen sooner or later.

BOOK VII.



CHAPTER X.

IVAN'S DIARY DURING HIS EXILE—EXTRACTS
THEREFROM.

THE Empress, in the course of her stormy outbreak, on the refusal of the Princess Marie and Ivan to be then and there united in marriage, uttered some words which were not intelligible to the rest of the company, but were fully understood by Ivan de Birón.

When he was recalled from his second term of exile, his papers were seized by the authorities at Pelem, and transmitted to the Empress for her perusal. In these papers there was much to

be found which showed what he had been thinking of during those dull and melancholy moments which he passed in complete solitude. Exile gave a great opportunity for thinking. Men thought then who had never thought before. Ivan's condition, during this second time of exile, was very favourable to thought. It has been said that under Elizabeth more indulgence had been granted to exiles than had been the case under previous reigns : and, at any rate, Ivan had been freed from those household cares and labours, which either for the Duke his master, or for the Serbatoff family, he had been wont to exercise during his first term of exile. Moreover, the many sufferings and disasters he had undergone in the interval, had rendered him a much more thoughtful man. Having no one to confide in, for his thoughts were such as he could not entrust to the sarcastic Nariskoff, he was fain to confide them to paper, and he kept a diary.

This diary had furnished the Empress with a fresh insight into his character. The course of his thinking was manifest. It was very crude : it

was very sad : it betrayed the feelings of one who, for the first time, began to think deeply and sorrowfully of his own condition, and of the condition of the world. Some extracts from this diary may serve to enlighten others, as they served to enlighten the Empress respecting the nature of a remarkable man—remarkable not so much for force of intellect, as for extreme sincerity and clearness of apprehension. They are as follows.

“ What does it all mean ? What does it all tend to ? If one could discern any purpose, one would be satisfied with all this misery : but the thought will come upon me, though I try to drive it away—why should it not all have been left alone ? What is the good of creation ?

“ All men are like an army marching through a hideous country, beset with every evil that can expend itself upon them. Their march is traceable by the dead bodies they leave upon the route. What do they march against ? Where is the possible conquest ? What, the possible victory ? Hitherto, none has been discovered. We are

nearly as barbarous as ever—it may be with a more polished, but a not less cruel barbarism than that which our ancestors suffered under my dread namesake, Ivan the Terrible. The suffering may be a little less : but, on the other hand, the bodies subjected to it are more sensitive from this civilisation, as they call it.

“I can see the use of sorrow. Mayhap, it has been serviceable to me : but is there not a great deal more of it than is needful to do the requisite work ? And then the animals ! Why should they suffer ? What can you claim for them in compensation for all their sufferings ? The scheme of the world is cruel, very cruel.

“I walked far away into this dismal country, yesterday. I came upon the great river before it loses itself in the marshes which make Pelem the fitting abode for exiles even under Elizabeth, surnamed the Clement. There was a mountain stream which flows into the great river. I ascended its banks, and came upon a mimic whirl-

pool. There was a huge log in it, one of those which are sent down by the hewers of wood upon the mountains. It had not had force enough, given it in its departure, to escape the unceasing action of this mimic whirlpool. Round and round it went ; and every time that it came to the spot at which it ought to have descended, there was a momentary pause ; but the whirling current was too strong, and took it round again. It was the life of any individual man. It was my life, infinitely solitary, obeying no impulse of its own, and not the impulse even of those who would more rightly direct it. I watched the thing for hours ; and saw the progress—progress !—of my own most felicitous life.

“ A very ingenious creature, man ! How one might praise him ! how exalt his great qualities—his forethought, his force, the myriad modes he has of trying to withstand his enemies, and to conquer his naked and miserable condition. But it is a pity that he expends so large a part of his ingenuity, at least the better half, in tor-

menting his fellow-man, and preparing assured misery for himself.

“My uncle, the great Duke of Courland ! It is a clear night, and I am looking upon these innumerable stars. Are they inhabited ? And, if so, is government there anything like what it is here ? His Highness seemed to think that the art of government was in keeping everybody down—everybody of whom he had the faintest suspicion that that body might presume to entertain any views of things on earth, or things in heaven, in the least degree opposed to the perfect wisdom of His Highness. And yet there was something in what he said. For if there were not Dukes of Courland, they would all be flying at each other's throats ; and perhaps it would have been worse without him than even with him. Who knows ? I wonder what he is doing now ? It must be very miserable to have no one to oppress. But there was much good in him ; and he bore the truth, when it was once told him. How I trembled as I told it !

“Nariskoff: what a man! There might have been a great deal of use made of that man. But nine-tenths of what is useful in mankind is thrown away. The poor fellow thinks that this world was only made for him to sneer at. And I am not much better than he is. He thought that I marked him not when he was striving to protect that black creature from the ants to-day. I saw it all; but what is the use of endeavouring to interfere with the beneficent course of nature? I knew that it was a shallow attempt, as shallow and unfeasible as his wild notion of freeing his serfs, to rescue that black wriggling thing from its tormentors and devourers. I am older than Nariskoff, though he does not know it—older in heart, older in mind, older in misery.

“They were meant to be a comfort to us, I suppose. Are they? Poor creatures as we men are, we do look a little below the surface, and do look a little beyond the home, and the nursery, and the city, and the court. The Court! Whereas it is all surface with them. Rank,

wealth, court favour, fine dress, jewels, all the minor decorums, these are their divinities. I do not wonder that Azra loves the stage—it is the fitting place for all women—and that the Princess loves the court, only a larger and less artistic stage. What a fool I have been! I recollect now, and I declare that memory has been a truant to me from that time to this: that she said to me when we were sitting in the wood together, acknowledged lovers—“Are you noble, dear Ivan? I wish that you were noble.” I ought to have seen through her worldliness then: but we men are the veriest fools in creation. The lion understands his lioness far better than a man does the woman that he loves. Oh, but she is lovely. She would delude a saint, or an angel, or even a devil. And what chance had I, a mere honest innocent youth, of understanding such a creature? Even now, though I know her well, I dare not watch her as she moves along among other women, not like any of them, but with a grace, a beauty, and a loveliness that is only her own. Why were such creatures in-

vented to deceive us? But I will think no more of her. I wonder what Horace really meant by that passage. (Here Ivan quoted a passage from one of the satires, which has been a difficulty to critics from his time to ours, and which was probably written down wrong in the waxen tablets on which those immortal poems were first engraved by the poet's stylus.)

“What an anti-climax, life! How we are fondled, and dandled, and made much of, just when we cannot understand the fondling, and when it is probably a great nuisance to us. Then, from childhood onwards, we are less and less loved, until, at length, the liking of the meanest serf would be very dear to one—a precious possession!

“If death would give one time to think, freed from the necessity of acting, it might be no great evil. It came into my mind that I should like to have died with her in my arms in that morass. What folly!

“The world is given up to hard and self-sufficient people. They alone prosper. Unembarrassed by the pain they cause, by the feelings they trample upon, by the ruins they walk over, on they march complacently to victory. They need not sympathy: they heed not antipathy: they are to themselves their own sufficient audience, and require no alien applause. They are the conquerors of the world.”

To the other extracts from Ivan's diary, however crude and morbid, no objection has here been made. This one, however, cannot be allowed to pass without some comment, for it embodies a delusion which is rife even at the present time. Men are still thought to be sagacious and capable, merely because they are hard. But let the hard man have sufficient scope wherein to develop his hardness, and to demonstrate his want of sympathy with other men—and ultimate failure is the result. After all, there are a great many men, women, and children in the world: it is not altogether composed of sticks and stones.

“When I look back upon my past life (one would think he had lived for 50 years at least) I perceive that all my errors have proceeded from my imagination. If I had seen things and persons as they really are, I should not have been thus befooled by them. If imagination had been a good gift, it would have been given to more people than it has been given. Those are most miserable who have the most of this dangerous quality.

“All other wisdom is superfluous for those who are wise enough, and strong enough, to live alone.”

The exact words used by the Empress, when she was storming up and down the reception-room of the Winter Palace, and upbraiding the recreant lovers with their folly, are not to be found in these extracts. Perhaps the Czarina only gave what she thought to be the substance of some of Ivan's remarks in his diary; or, again, the very words might have occurred in other extracts, though they are not to be found in these.

BOOK VII.



CHAPTER XI.

THE FRIENDSHIP OF NARISKOFF AND AZRA.

THERE was one curious and unexpected result of the reception which the Empress had given for the purpose of uniting Ivan and the Princess, and which had ended so disastrously. Nariskoff and Azra became intimate and affectionate friends.

Nariskoff was wont to say that the principal difference between love and the bite of a mad dog was, "that in the former case the effect of

the poison was instantaneous, whilst in the latter it lingered long in the constitution before its fatal outbreak."

There are many distinctions to be drawn between love and liking; but the rapidity of the effect is similar in both cases. Each of these two new friends had heard a very unsatisfactory character of the other. In earlier days, Ivan, when speaking to Azra of his first exile at Pelem, had described Nariskoff to her as a very remarkable man, as, indeed, a man of some genius, but, at the same time, as a very discreditable and malicious person. During Ivan's second term of exile, he had not spared Azra, when enlarging to Nariskoff upon the general faithlessness and worthlessness of women. When these two, Nariskoff and Azra, had met in the grand reception-room at the Palace, each thought that Ivan had spoken most unjustly of the other, and was the more disposed, on that account, to think favourably of the other.

It seems, too, as if it was necessary for Nariskoff to attach himself to some one person,

and to follow his or her fortunes assiduously. In the present instance it was not destitution which compelled this devotion on his part. The Empress had been true to her word, and had provided employment, of a clerkly nature, in her Chancery for Nariskoff.

His labours were not so absorbing, but that he had much spare time ; and all of it was given to attendance upon Azra. With her he became a great authority in all matters relating to her art. Originally a man of fine taste, and of as high a cultivation as was then to be obtained in Russia, he was really able to be of great service to a prima donna, who, however rich in natural gifts, had undertaken a career, which, to be consummately successful, does require large and liberal cultivation. Besides, Azra, still much unskilled in the ways of the world, and very artless in all matters not immediately connected with her own profession, often needed a protector of her interests, and one who should, in some measure, fulfil the part of a father to her. Nariskoff delighted in doing this. It gave him a certain

consequence with other people: it gave him what he had much needed for many years—self-respect.

It is a shrewd remark that has often been made in the present era of the world:—namely, that those nations are very felicitous in which there is an opportunity for sudden and complete change of career. America, for instance, offers this opportunity; and in all countries where, from similar circumstances, this kind of change is possible and frequent, great benefits to the individual inhabitants of that country will ensue.

Nariskoff was able, even at this mature period of his life, to commence, as it were, living afresh: and the man had sufficient force of mind and purpose to make the most of his new start in life.

Some cynical and perverse people have disbelieved in the possibility of the continuance of profound friendship between persons of different sexes, without its degenerating into love on one side or another. Now, in this case, there was no

thought of love on either side. Nariskoff had the good sense to recognise this at once. He knew he possessed few attractions as a lover ; but that he could be a very serviceable and affectionate friend. Moreover he knew, and fully appreciated, that fact, which had been, for so long a time, undiscerned by Ivan—that Azra was one of those singular characters, the whole passion of whose lives is thrown into the development of the work which they think, perhaps too fondly, it is especially given for them to do. It is, perhaps, hardly just to say that this is singular, for there are many more instances of it than are generally recognized.

Azra, on her part, thoroughly understood and appreciated the relation that had grown up between herself and her new friend. If the truth must be told, she had never liked anybody so much as the old gypsy, the chief of her tribe, who had been kind to her in her childhood ; and she now transferred this sort of liking to Nariskoff. But it was a liking which, although exceedingly great, would never pass the barrier

which separates the most extreme liking from even the faintest love.

To Nariskoff she could tell all her troubles and her difficulties. He was to conciliate, or rule obtuse managers ; to persuade, or terrify recreant actors and actresses into taking and fulfilling the parts which the prima donna had resolved to assign to them. A point in her character, which had been dormant, or unobserved, in the earlier times of her career, now came forward with prominence. She was a little despot. She had been accustomed to witness in the proceedings of her own people, the great advantage of despotism. There, in that tribe, the chief had always been implicitly obeyed ; and Azra, like the rest of them, had yielded him this obedience. Now that she was a great personage, she arrogated to herself similar dominion ; and already in the course of her career, this proneness to demand obedience to all her whims and wishes, had been productive of much misery to herself, and much discomfort to all those who had to work with her in their common enterprise.

There was another circumstance which much endeared Nariskoff to Azra; and which, in all similar conjunctures, is very potent. It is a very flattering and seductive thing when any person, man or woman, behaves differently to you from what he or she does to the rest of the world. Hence it is that some of the most disagreeable of human beings are intensely liked, or passionately loved, by some few persons, because those persons are honoured or gratified by a different course of conduct being shown to them from that which is administered to the rest of the world. Nariskoff, a powerful master of sarcasm, whose influence had chiefly rested upon that malign power, never indulged in anything approaching to sarcasm with Azra.

Several months had elapsed while this friendship between Azra and Nariskoff had been maturing. This time had passed in a very painful manner to the other principal personages of this narrative, with the exception of the Empress Elizabeth. After that memorable interview from which she had retired with disgust,

she had made no effort to reconcile the lovers. They were fools, and as such were not worthy of further thought from her. She was too good-natured to visit their folly upon them by any unkindness on her part. On the contrary, she had thoroughly reinstated Ivan de Biron in her favour as an official person.

Once or twice, when receiving him upon matters of business, she had not been able to restrain herself from some droll or sarcastic allusion to his folly; but she had gone no further.

She had made the Princess Marie one of her maids-of-honour; and had, in like manner, more than once playfully made some allusion to the inutility of the presence of notaries when the persons principally concerned did not know their own minds, or had no minds of which any knowledge could be ascertained. But the Empress was always most kind and gracious to the Princess Marie; and had even gone so far as to form another project for the welfare of the young

lady, which project had reference to the new Austrian Ambassador.

It is not to be supposed but that Azra and Nariskoff talked frequently to one another of Ivan and the Princess Marie.

Nariskoff had to a certain extent given up his interest in these two young persons. In fact, he spoke of them much as the Empress thought of them, as two over-refined, fastidious, shallow young people, who did not know their own minds, and would not let any one else, any wiser person, disclose those minds to them, and thus make all things end like a novel, where the lovers, after infinite mystifications and innumerable delicacies of conduct, which no one can understand but themselves, at last, at any rate, contrive to come to what, as Nariskoff sneeringly observed, must be supposed to be a happy conclusion.

Azra, on the contrary, fully maintained her interest in the lovers; and was most deeply anxious that some conclusion should be arrived at. She had not changed her feelings towards

Ivan, such as they had been for the two preceding years; and she loved and venerated the Princess as her earliest and best patron.

One evening, after a performance which had been more than usually well received by the Russian public at St. Petersburg, Azra and Nariskoff returned to her lodgings, to talk over the events of the evening, and to congratulate one another upon the adoption of some devices, both as regards scenes and scenery, which they had persuaded the manager, not without difficulty, to allow them to arrange according to their peculiar artistic views.

Much of this had reference to a forthcoming opera, which had excited great expectations. Before they parted, Azra turned the conversation to the position of their two young friends. She had seen the Princess in the course of the day, and had been more struck than ever with the fading health, depressed spirits and overclouded beauty, which she had noticed in her friend, and which

she justly attributed to the unhappy state of the Princess's mind.

The result of this conversation, in the influence it had upon the fertile brain of Nariskoff, will be seen in the ensuing chapter.

BOOK VII



CHAPTER XII.

THE PRINCESS MARIE AND IVAN ATTEND A REHEARSAL AT THE OPERA—BUT ARE NOT VERY USEFUL AS CRITICS.

“LET us have them here at a rehearsal ; leave them alone ; and see what will happen.”

These were the words of Nariskoff, suddenly uttered to Azra one morning when they were walking about the stage, and preparing for the new opera. They had together inspected the work of the scene painter ; had held several conferences with the manager ; had instructed the carpenters ; and had assisted at a rehearsal of the

ballet. This last piece of stage-business was one in which Azra took an interest generally unknown to persons of her high theatrical rank. She, herself, had been a most consummate dancer; looked upon dancing as a fine art; and often wished that she could descend, occasionally, from her high position, and be a leader in the ballet, as well as a great tragic actress.

Azra was not in the best humour, being dissatisfied with the performance she had just witnessed; and she replied to Nariskoff rather pettishly, but still with somewhat of her usual deference. "My little father, I doubt whether real love has ever been made in this region of the theatre—certainly not by the great lords who are permitted, contrary to my express desire, to come behind the scenes; and certainly not by the actors and actresses on the stage, at least according to my poor experience."

"You see, my dear Azra," said Nariskoff, "Ivan and the Princess are what are called 'original people.' These, according to my thinking, are among the greatest fools in ex-

istence. They will insist upon making for themselves the grooves to run in, instead of using the well-worn grooves that have been formed by their countless predecessors. The best energies of their early lives are wasted in fashioning these new grooves; and when they have made them, if they ever do make them, their own courses, still quite original no doubt, generally lead to the inane kingdom of Nowhere. I was myself an original; and see to what it has brought me. I must, forsooth, have notions about our serfs, three or four centuries at least too early. Not that I repent of that, for otherwise should I have known you? You, too, are an original; but we are both of a higher order than these young persons, who are, properly speaking, common-place people, but do not seem to know it."

"Young people!" exclaimed Azra. "If this goes on much longer, they will both be middle-aged people. As for poor Ivan, he is beginning to be grey. I think, though, that he is handsomer than ever."

Nariskoff was not very fond of hearing Ivan's

good looks praised by Azra. He replied, "It certainly is a great merit in you women that you do not mind the bloom being taken off the peach, especially when you have had some hand in removing it. I am afraid that we men are not quite so indifferent to the loss of youthful looks in the women whom we love. Much depends upon the cause, dear Azra. Now when I was a young man, I soon lost the bloom of youth; but it was from thought, deep thought, and over-anxious study."

"Let us not talk of ourselves, my little father; but what we can do for them," replied Azra.

The only thing which was still repugnant to Azra in her new friend, was his inordinate vanity. It shocked her simple, honest nature; and she always sought to discourage it.

She added. "I cannot say that this is exactly the spot I should have chosen as the fitting place for the reconciliation of two lovers. It seems to me that it would dis-

courage all sentiment, and show the unreality of passion."

"Now you, dear Azra," replied Nariskoff, "are becoming commonplace. The semi-darkness, the singularity of the position, the strange loneliness, and I will take care that they shall be alone, may have a contrary effect to that which was to be found in the great reception-room of the Winter Palace. At any rate, let us try another extreme."

"They have often enough been alone together," said Azra.

"Oh yes," replied Nariskoff. "They were sufficiently alone together during their last pleasant trip from Pelem to St. Petersburg. I heard a good deal about it from Ivan himself. Have you ever seen two girls sitting at a spinet, who thoroughly disliked each other? Girls sometimes dislike one another, you know. Well there they are, obliged to sit very close together, their little hands sometimes crossing one another; and all the harmony they succeed in bringing

out from that tiresome, rattling, jingling instrument, fails to produce any harmony for their two discordant selves. They get up disliking one another still more if possible than ever.

"The company know nothing of this, any more than the poor Prince did, when his 'dear Ivan'—as he always calls him now—and his beloved Marie were supporting him in the telega."

"You are not very encouraging, Nariskoff," said Azra; "and you really seem to have taken a dislike to both of them."

"No: I don't dislike them. The philosophic mind is incapable of dislike."

"But mark you, I propose this plan only to please you, for I must confess they have almost ceased to be of any interest to me. As I have often said, I hate fools—people who do not know their own minds, and cannot see into other minds when they are as open as the day. Now I never—"

Azra, fearing a fresh outburst of egotism,

interrupted his speech, and signified her assent to the plan.

It was easily carried into effect. Azra had only to ask the Princess to attend a rehearsal, to which Marie readily assented, on the supposition that she was to be a useful critic of the musical part of the performance; while Nariskoff had only to tell Ivan that his judgment was much wanted as regards the effect of the scenery, in which Paris, a city well known to Ivan, was to be represented,

Azra, in her simplicity, had sought to make it what is called "a dress rehearsal;" but this the wiser Nariskoff imperatively put aside. He relied mainly upon the touching nature of the love scenes, which Azra and a new tenor, of very high qualifications, were to enact; and a dress rehearsal would only be a hindrance to his scheme.

The appointed day came. The Princess Marie and Ivan, each ignorant of the other being invited, arrived in due time at the theatre.

However much any one may be prepared for

what he, or she, may see behind the scenes and at a rehearsal, the reality is nearly sure to outstrip the imagination. In those days, too, there was not that multiplicity of publication which, informing everybody of every obscure detail in the world, deprives almost every new and strange scene of much of its newness and its strangeness. To use a current commercial phrase, which is a very apt and significant one, all sight-seeing now is, to a certain extent, discounted by previous description.

The Princess was absolutely startled when, entering at the stage door, she was conducted by Azra into the *penetralia* of the theatre. The gaunt appearance of everything, the splotchy aspect of the painted scenery, the vastness of the space, the carpenters knocking and hammering up in the flies, the grim effect of the cordage and the mechanical contrivances—appalled her; and, for the moment, she drew back irresolutely. Azra took her hand, and led her to a chair in front of the stage, just inside the foot-lights.

Ivan arrived a few minutes afterwards. He, of course, was not surprised by what he saw. He had been many times behind the scenes, during his courtship of Azra. Nariskoff seemed to have forgotten this fact, which might prove a drawback upon the success of his scheme. But Ivan's present revisiting of this part of the theatre, only served to recall very bitter memories to him. His past folly came vividly before his mind ; and it was with a sense of humiliation that he accompanied Nariskoff, who had waited for him, to a seat in front of the stage. He was not a little surprised when he found the Princess Marie sitting near him.

Nariskoff took a chair between the two ; and, after their first courteous and respectful greeting to one another, he prevented all further conversation between them, by a long and continuous explanation of the principal situations in the opera of which they were to witness the rehearsal.

It commenced ; and still Nariskoff allowed no opportunity of conversation between Ivan and

the Princess during the first and second acts. In the middle of the third he left them, saying that "the confounded carpenters would be sure to go wrong without his supervision." "You must know, my dear Ivan, our manager is almost a simpleton in these matters. He holds his place, as a good many of you great men hold yours—by the divine right of incapacity to fill it. I do not know what would happen if I were not to come to his aid. Look at his low forehead. There can be no sense in such a man. Besides he doesn't know a word of French; and that little creature there, Mons. Duval, who has been fretting and fuming like an incipient volcano for the last half hour, is a fellow we have got from Paris, who supposes he is the only man who can put this thing upon the stage."

Both the Princess and Ivan felt the full awkwardness of their position; but, as well-bred persons, resolved to carry it through discreetly. They were secretly enraged with Azra and Nariskoff for bringing them thus together. They did not, however, discern any plot. Azra's

devotion to the stage, and Nariskoff's devotion to her, were well known to them ; and they merely thought what an instance of stupidity it was to have chosen the same day for the presence of both of them as critics.

They interchanged common-place remarks. The Princess said, "How well Azra was looking : the fatigue of her career did not seem to tell upon her." Ivan muttered something in reply about paint being judiciously employed by women, at which cross speech the Princess only smiled.

Ivan then said ; "Who would have thought that our friend Nariskoff would have turned out to be the arch-manager of theatres ? And he has lately become so amiable too. I suppose that all his sarcasms are kept for managers, actors, and actresses, as he lets the rest of the world go on in peace. By the way, Princess, have you read any of this Marivaux's works ?" The words of the opera were Marivaux's : the music Rameau's.

The Princess had hardly time to answer in the

negative, before Azra, and the principal tenor came to the front of the stage. Hitherto, in this act, there had only been some choral songs, during which talking might be allowed to the spectators. Now there was dead silence.

Nariskoff, not quite so wise as he supposed himself to be, had intended this to be a most touching scene, capable of evoking love in all human breasts. The good man, himself, had always been much affected by it; but then he had become used to the sorry surroundings which are inevitable in such a rehearsal. With the Princess Marie and Ivan the effect was different; and it seemed as if this, like all schemes for the same purpose, was to produce quite a contrary effect to that which had been desired or expected. With them the shrewd saying had been verified. "Out of the antidote comes in the long run a poison,"* only that, in their case, the process had been swift, and all the antidotes, which the

* Aus dem Gegengift wird in die Länge ein Gift.—*Jean Paul Richter*.

Empress, or Azra, or Nariskoff had administered, had only served to produce at once fresh alienation.

It was a very cold day, cold even for Russia at that time of the year; and the new tenor was furred up to the throat. Azra was in a very warm and homely dress. They both sang admirably; but their gestures of affection only indicated, not developed or consummated (for Azra, with her usual feelings in such cases, did not much like the tenor; and he was mortally afraid of her) had something inexpressibly ludicrous about them. Air-drawn embraces, kisses that are indeed but given to the winds, and arms encircling only fancied waists—are not exactly the most fitting means to bring to mind and reinforce the suppressed passion of mutual and devoted love.

The Princess had a keen sense of the ludicrous; and Ivan was not devoid of that perilous possession. Each could perceive that the other was with difficulty restraining laughter. Each saw that the book of the opera, with which

Nariskoff had furnished them, was held with an unsteady hand.

Ivan spoke first. There was just a little bitterness in his feelings towards Azra. No man, however much he may have conquered his love for a woman, is entirely pleased at her having conquered her love, if she ever had any, for him.

“Our excellent Azra,” he said, “how well she sings! But she is very like one of the carpenters we can still see in those upper regions, Princess, awaiting the return of the chorus to recommence his hammering.”

“I fail, Sir, to see the resemblance,” responded the Princess; “but no doubt there is some deep meaning in your observation.”

“I only mean,” rejoined Ivan, “that she is as free from the full tenderness and passion of the scene as that carpenter. They both only care for their own work, and hammer away at it nobly.”

“But her ‘work,’ Baron, as you are pleased to

call it, consists in the passion of the scene, and that she does admirably.”

“Then, Princess, why were you so inclined to laugh? ‘Does it admirably’—yes the scenic foretaste of a scenic representation—a double fiction! Oh! no doubt she ‘does it admirably.’ But he, the poor tenor, really feels it, or something like it. We men are a little more heartfelt and truthful, even on the stage.”

“And we women, Sir, off it.”

Notwithstanding this somewhat sharp encounter of wit, in which a great deal more was meant than was said, there was something in the tone of voice, and in the look of the Princess as their eyes met, which induced Ivan to get up from his place, and take the chair left vacant by the crafty Nariskoff, a movement which was tacitly acquiesced in by the lady, although she slightly drew back from the position, (that of leaning towards him) which she had occupied during the utterance of the foregoing sentences.

There was, then, silence between them for the

next two or three minutes, while the prima donna and the first tenor, who had hitherto sung in solo, joined in a final duet of much fervour and fondness, that is as far as the singing was concerned. Then the chorus of inappropriately dressed peasants, for they were in their everyday clothes, came forward to express their joy at these proceedings of the principal performers ; and the distant hammering re-commenced.

Again, there was a subject of much mirth for the two spectators. The principal peasant, to whom the tenor confided his many sorrows throughout the opera, was a man gifted with a highly comic cast of features. In fact he was one of the chief actors in low comedy ; and, in that capacity, was well known to all the frequenters of the theatre at St. Petersburg. He happened to be an excellent musician, and a severe leader of a chorus ; and, though Azra and Nariskoff had felt the greatest doubts about entrusting this part to him, they had not been able to find any one at St. Petersburg who, to use Ivan's phrase, could do the work so well. They,

too, had been very sensitive as to the effect that might be produced by this man's comicality; and Nariskoff had wasted hours in endeavouring to make him change his usual expression of feature and his habitual drollness of gesture, for expressions and gestures more suitable to the character of a confidant of that much-enduring first tenor. This effort had only produced something still more ludicrous.

Nothing creates more sympathy and more harmony among people than a similar appreciation of what is ludicrous. Bitter enemies have sometimes forgotten their enmity, even in the midst of fierce debate, when something has occurred which excited equally the risible tendencies of both of them. And here were two human beings who, without any outward and accidental provocation, were, though they would not recognize it, in the deepest and most abiding sympathy with each other. They were both eminently polite and highly-bred personages. Ivan had now much more of the sustained manners of the man of the world than had

been the case in the earlier days of their acquaintance.

They strove hard to maintain the proper gravity of countenance; and all the harder, because they felt that the great comic actor played at them, his only audience. Still they could not restrain themselves from occasional comments in whispers, in which, somewhat to the astonishment of both of them, insensibly the words "Ivan" and "Marie" glided into the conversation.

Once, too, Ivan touched the Princess lightly, wishing to draw her attention to the upper regions, where two of the carpenters had suspended their work; and, laughing boisterously, were regarding their favourite actor, the only one they cared to listen to.

It was the touch that is like no other—the touch of the one who loves us best, and whom we love best.

And so the play went on. From what was mirthful, Ivan, grown more daring, and thinking that this might be the last chance he should

ever have of ascertaining what he most desired to know, deviated in his talk to what was more serious, though still entirely bearing upon the scenes enacted before them. He even ventured to say "These happy peasants on the stage, Marie, are not quite so happy, I fear, when they get home through the melting snow, as some real peasants, or what for the time were little other than peasants, whom I have known; but then," he added with a sigh, "those peasants I speak of, were at some distance from St. Petersburg."

The Princess paused before she made any reply to this pointed speech. She knew that it was the critical moment of her life. She literally trembled as she thought of this. It was in vain that the comic actor, who had again come forward on the stage, and in the most highly tragic-comic manner, was declaring in a loud 'aside' to the audience, that, in his opinion, "all would yet be right, however badly things might look just now:"—and, while so saying, the good man was never more comical both in his

countenance and in his gestures. The Princess was not consoled by his promise of future joy to the actors on the stage, or moved to laughter by the drollness of the manner in which these pleasing assurances were given. Still looking fixedly at the actor, she felt in the background of her mind (and the mind is surely double!), how ludicrous all this was upon the stage, and withal how serious the present moment was for the unemployed actors sitting near the footlights.

At length, after what seemed to her an interminable time, though it had only occupied a few brief moments, she replied with a firmness of tone that astonished herself. "There is one peasant, Ivan, a girl whom I once knew, who has been far more unhappy at St. Petersburg than she ever was, even in the earliest times of her peasant life, when furthest from St. Petersburg."

The thrill of delight with which Ivan heard these significant words may be imagined. He was, however, very judicious, and did not presume immediately upon them, or indeed venture

to make any reply. This reticence on his part, though prudent, was very painful to the Princess; and she felt a kind of remorse—the remorse that pride feels on having made an acknowledgment which it has reason to believe has met with no response from the other side.

Little else passed between them during the rest of the rehearsal; and, when it was over, they still remained in their seats. They saw Azra and her ardent but subdued tenor separate with a slight bow, he choosing the left wing, and she the right, as their points of exit from the stage. They saw the poor peasants slouch away in a manner very little corresponding with the joy they had recently expressed on the stage, at the happy conclusion of the opera. They saw the performers in the ballet take their departure—the stage-friendliness still to be seen among some of the girls, who, with clasped hands, executed a final pirouette as they made their exit. They saw Monsieur Duval and the manager move off together, the emphatic French-

man gesticulating, and apparently protesting against somebody or something, to the last.

And then they were indeed alone, and were, for a few minutes, silent. At length, according to the formal courtesy of those days, he offered her his hand, and proposed that they should make together a further survey of these strange desert regions. He had, he said, before, learnt something about them.

This was not a very judicious remark; and Ivan fancied he felt a slight withdrawal of her hand from his. He bit his lips, and inwardly cursed his folly, knowing that she must think that it was during his pursuit of Azra, that he had become so familiar with the ways behind the stage.

Meanwhile, the cunning Nariskoff had been peeping at them through an aperture in one of the scenes, and had been delighted to observe that Ivan had taken his chair, and that, too, at a time when Nariskoff supposed that the situation on the stage had been most touching and effective.

Little he dreamt, though the discovery would not have been displeasing to his satirical nature, that it was the ludicrous and not the serious feature of the rehearsal that had brought about this proximity.

At the end of the rehearsal, he had rushed into the green-room to tell Azra the apparent success of *his* scheme, as he called it, and to warn her to abjure all civility, and to keep herself away from the "idiots." "Let them wander about and lose themselves: they will perhaps find a little common sense while they are thus lost. Oh! you must have moved their hearts, Azra. I never heard you greater. It would have re-melted two hardened bits of lava, to have heard you in that third act. I don't deny that my tears were very near my eyes, and they are generally a very long way off, I can tell you, my dear."

And Marie and Ivan did lose themselves; for they wandered about aimlessly, the last thought, or wish, of either being to find an exit from that bewildering place. Little need is

there of words when two human creatures, who are beyond all measure fond of one another, are wandering about hand-in-hand, saying next to nothing to one another but the utmost trivialities in open speech, yet telling everything to one another by that low, murmuring tone of fondness well known to lovers, and perhaps, too, by that indescribable gladness of approach which the lightest touch, or the faintest pressure, will abundantly disclose.

It is somewhat of a hard case for the man, but it is imperatively requisite for him, on such occasions, to say something which shall no longer be dubious, and which shall bring matters to a definite conclusion, one way or the other. Considering all that had passed between these two, it was not surprising that Ivan still hesitated to say the final words which were needful. Indeed one wonders how any thoughtful person, cognizant as he must be of his many failings and of the largeness of the enterprise he is about to undertake, can summon up the audacity to say, in the spirit, if not in the words, of

the old song "Oh, come with me, and be my love."

Ivan made this great venture thus:—"The Empress is a very wise woman, Marie, and a very good woman, is she not?"

The Princess Marie hesitated a little to assent to the latter part of the proposition; but, with feminine tact, replied:—"She is everything, Ivan, that is most kind, and most gracious; and she makes my father so happy by her goodness to me; but—"

Ivan hurriedly interposed:—"But of her wisdom there is no doubt, Marie; and never was she more wise than when she said, 'We were two fools, and did not know our own minds.' I wonder she did not order us to be beheaded then and there, only that she has an unaccountable objection to depriving herself of any of her loving subjects, in this summary fashion. But she was wise then, Marie?—Say yes."

The Princess withdrew her hand from his, and retired a step or two from him. Then,

looking up at him timidly and shyly, she merely said :—" I think she was."

Ivan drew her towards him, held her in his arms, and kissed her. The girl, instinctively, looked around and above her ; and reproachfully said " Oh ! Ivan ;" for, on looking upwards, she had caught sight of the two carpenters to whom her attention had been drawn by Ivan during the rehearsal, and who were now regarding with high glee this additional scene which had not exactly been intended for their observation. Ivan's eyes followed hers ; but he was not so easily disconcerted.

" They may have seen from those heights some scene of this kind, my love, before now ; but they have never seen one in which there has been such truth."

" And such fidelity !" replied the Princess, with an arch smile, and in a tone not entirely devoid of sarcasm.

" Oh ! Marie ! What have you not to forgive ? "

" And what have *you* not to forgive ? "

replied the Princess ; “ but I may offer the usual excuse of fools for their folly, ‘ I did it for the best.’ ”

They said no more then ; but resumed their wanderings ; and we will not describe what happened when they were out of sight of the spies from the heights, and when they were assured that they were indeed alone. There were many fond explanations to be made ; and much to be told which had, hitherto, been obscure and perplexing to both of them. At length they were interrupted by the presence of Azra and Nariskoff, who now thought that the lovers had been alone together for a sufficiently long time ; and that, as there was no further pretext for their own absence, they must come forward to conduct their visitors from the theatre.

The outspoken Azra, at once assured of what had happened, for the way in which acknowledged lovers walk together is like that of no other companions, was ready with congratulations ; but these Nariskoff repressed with a frown, and merely hoped that the opera had met with

their approval, and that they would favour him and Azra with their criticisms.

The Princess and Ivan, however, were not in a critical mood, and they could only say that the acting, singing, and scenery, were, all, perfection. Nariskoff accompanied them to their sledges; and, after he had closed the door upon them, executed a dance of delight, which sent Azra into fits of laughter, and which, she said, showed his superiority to the '*Dieu de la danse*,' the all-renowned Vestris, the delight of the Court of Louis the Fifteenth.

"My Azra," he exclaimed, "our Empress is a well-meaning woman and not devoid of intelligence; but when you come to real wit and real knowledge of mankind—and womankind too—I know some one who is greatly Her Majesty's superior. And some one else's too. This was not the place, these were not the surroundings, for the reconciliation of two lovers? You are a good girl, Azra, and not without some insight into things; but masculine wit still retains its supremacy."

Azra was too much delighted to contend the point; and Nariskoff hastened to convey the good news to the Empress Elizabeth. He did not do so, without letting Her Majesty be made thoroughly well aware how superior her poor servant was to any sovereign, in the management of love affairs.

The good-natured woman took all this boastfulness very pleasantly; praised Nariskoff warmly for his great sagacity; and ended by declaring that she would have the whole scene repeated over again, which, at the Palace, had previously been such a failure. It touched her honour, she said, that this should be done. And done it was, to the great joy, and amidst the welcome merriment, of all those who were interested in the event, and who had been witnesses of the former failure. The marriage was celebrated in the Winter Palace with all Imperial pomp and ceremony;—this part of the proceedings, however, not being much to the taste of either Marie or Ivan. But they were too happy to make any demur to the gracious wishes of their sovereign.

Not the least delighted of the bystanders was the old Prince Serbatoff. He had now secured a son-in-law whom he loved, and upon whom his accumulated wealth of worldly wisdom would never be wasted.

BOOK VII.



CHAPTER XIII.

A SUMMING-UP OF THE FATE AND FORTUNES OF
THE PRINCIPAL PERSONAGES IN THE NARRATIVE.

EVEN living human beings are for the most part hardly more than phantoms to one another : so little does man know about his fellow-men. An eloquent French writer has said :—*Sous cette enveloppe épaisse du corps, vous ressemblez à un voyageur qui, la nuit, dans sa tente, voit, ou croit voir, des fantômes passer.**

The beings we meet in books may be considered phantoms of the second order, still more phan-

* LAMENNAIS. 'Paroles d'un Croyant.'

tasmal than those whom we encounter in real life. Yet some of the former seem to us to be very real ; and this is especially the case when, as in this work, personages are brought before us, who did at some time or other really exist, and respecting whom we have, at least, the impressions which those personages have produced upon another mind.

Such considerations may form an excuse for narrating briefly the events which happened to the principal personages of this story.

Love is not the only great thing in the world, and lovers are not the only interesting beings. And though his love may be the one “bright particular star” in a man’s life, yet in the course of that life, it is perhaps of more importance, at any rate as regards his labours and his fortunes, whether he is liked than whether he is loved. For ever, even in times when men pretend to be most considerate and just, that proverb holds good, which proclaims the immense advantage of possessing those qualities which make men liked—which make them favourites

with their own immediate circle and with the world—namely, that one man may leap the hedge which another man may not look over.

Ivan de Biron did, in an eminent degree, possess those qualities which make a man acceptable to all those with whom he is brought in contact ; and accordingly, he rose, as might be expected, to high dignities and offices in the State.

Was he happy in domestic life?—a question we are always anxious to have answered about any remarkable man. It may be answered that he was. Not that it must be supposed that the somewhat difficult and perverse temper of the Princess was immediately rendered smooth and easy by marriage. But the patient and enduring nature of Ivan prevailed ; and he was always tender towards her, ever recollecting what she had undergone for his sake. Sometimes, it is true, there threatened to be serious differences between this couple, not altogether well matched ; and this was when the Princess's eager, impulsive nature drove her into injustice—a thing which Ivan could never tolerate.

The only person to whom the Princess ever confided any domestic trouble, was her good mistress, the Empress Elizabeth. From her the Princess always received the best advice. By reason of that delicate perception of character with which the Czarina was blessed, she understood Ivan even better than his own wife did. "My dear," she would say, "in almost all things, we are not only much better, but much wiser, than the men; but in one respect they are our superiors. They are far more just than we are. You may manage your Ivan, and have your own way completely (for, my dear, you do love to have your own way), except in some matter where justice, or what he thinks to be justice, is concerned."

The Princess was wise enough to profit by this advice; and so Ivan and his wife did ultimately live very happily together, the happiness increasing as the years went on.

Azra's renown grew greater, year by year; and she became one of the most distinguished actresses of her time. She was true to her resolve

to make every feeling subservient to her art. Hers was not a long career, for she died, at that age so fatal to genius, thirty-seven, of a disease which, though not known at that time by that name, seems to have been diphtheria.

Nariskoff, who, giving up his situation in the Imperial household, had devoted himself entirely to watching over the interests and the welfare of Azra, who had accompanied her to the principal capitals of Europe, and who had tenderly nursed her in her last illness, did not survive her long.

In fact his death followed hers in the short space of five months. It was a remarkable ending of the life of a man who had, for the greater part of his mature years, loved nobody very much, and had been devoted to nothing but cynicism and sarcasm. It cannot be said that he died of a broken heart; but it may be truly affirmed that he died of an unemployed heart, of a heart that felt it had nothing more to do in this world, and so declined to go on with needless pulsations—a disease not catalogued in medical

books, but much more frequent, perhaps, than the world is wont to imagine.

The fortunes of Kalynch must not be omitted. He passed his days in Ivan's family ; and was, for the most part, a contented and a happy man. How can, indeed, a man be otherwise than happy, who has established a theory in his own mind which explains the course of human events—to other minds appearing so lawless and irregular ?

Besides, Kalynch's theory was not merely explanatory, but deeply instructive, as it enabled him to judge rightly of all human affairs. What, to other people, might seem a misfortune, he knew to be a benefit ; and what appeared to them a joy, he knew to be a calamity.

Ivan and Marie had two children. The first was a girl, the second a boy. The birth of the girl had come at a time when, according to the Kalynch law, a joy was to be expected ; and, accordingly, Kalynch's countenance was as joyful as that of any other member of the household.

When the boy was born, it was the time, according to that severe law, when a calamity should happen. Kalynch's countenance was the only one that wore gloom upon that occasion; which was celebrated with much festivity, by Ivan's friends and dependants. Kalynch would have rejoiced, if he could have done so honestly; but this was not possible. Henceforward Kalynch, who always indulged in the belief in general laws, (laws subservient to his own,) concluded that the birth of girls was a blessing, and the birth of boys a misfortune. The world might differ from him on this point; but, according to Kalynch, the world was generally wrong in its conclusions.

"I suppose," he said, addressing the other servants, "you imagined that it would have been a fine thing if master had married that great actress; but I think I saw a little further than the rest of you then. Not that it was my wisdom, but that I knew what must be, according to the principle which rules the course of all human events. Yes, yes, he has said it.

The Empress Elizabeth had not a very long reign ; but it was a very glorious one. The glory, however, so far as it was gained by her success in arms, continued to be most painful to her ; and, on the occasion of her great victory at Cunersdoff, she betrayed to the world the agony she felt at the deaths of so many “innocent persons,” as she justly called them.

There is a letter of Louis XV. which indicates the anxiety that Elizabeth always manifested in the interests of peace. She had intimated to the King her desire to be a party, as a mediatrix, to the treaty of the Quadruple Alliance. The King in reply wrote thus :—

Le dessein que votre majesté a conçu d'être la médiatrice des Puissances qui sont en guerre, est digne de votre cœur, et touche sensiblement le mien. C'est un nouveau sujet de vous admirer ! Tous les Princes vous en doivent des remerciemens, et les miens sont d'autant plus sincères, que je vois mes désirs les plus chers secondés par les vôtres. Je peux vous jurer, Madame ma sœur, que je n'ai

jamais eu les armes à la main, que dans les vues d'assurer la paix ; et mes succès fortifiant ces sentimens, les revers seuls auraient pu les rendre moins vifs.

C'est à la Souveraine à qui je dois le plus d'estime, que les nations devront le plus grand bienfait. Les Rois ne peuvent aspirer chez eux qu'à faire la félicité de leurs sujets ; vous ferez celle des Rois et des Peuples. Vous en serez, s'il se peut, Madame, plus chère, plus vénérable aux vôtres ; et votre règne en sera plus heureux, quand les bénédictions de l'Europe redoubleront celles qu'on vous donne dans vos États.

Such were the consistent efforts which this great Empress made to avoid the bloodshed both of her own people, and of the people of allied or hostile nations. Her career offers a singular example of how little any one person, however highly placed, can effect, when endeavouring to counteract the general tenour and tendency of the age in which he or she has the fortune, prematurely if so it may be said, to live. And,

indeed, it is doubtful whether she could have accomplished much more of her peaceful designs even in this Age, still very prone to indulge in what ought to be the obsolete barbarism of war.

There is every reason to think that the favourable change which has, in the course of the narrative, been indicated as taking place in the Duke of Courland's character, became permanent. He ultimately regained his Duchy; but history makes no mention of any further severities on his part; and, before he died, he abdicated in favour of his son.

Marshal Münnich remained to the end of his life, and he lived to the age of eighty-four, the same active, energetic, brilliant man, full of schemes and projects of all kinds, as he proved himself to be in the events that have been recorded here. He, too, seems to have been much improved by exile; for, as will hereafter be seen, he maintained his fidelity under circumstances of great difficulty, and when he must have perceived that this fidelity might prove his ruin.

At Elizabeth's death, an incident took place which does not redound to the credit of those eminent Christians, for such they had become, the Duke of Courland and Marshal Münnich, although the result could hardly have been otherwise.

Peter III. succeeded Elizabeth on the throne of the Russian Empire. This Czar has usually been considered insane; but I fail to see any clear signs of madness in his reign of a few months—a reign cut short by the wicked intrigues of his wife Catherine II. One of his first acts was to recall from Siberia the political exiles of every kind, who were located there; and also, which might not have been a very wise proceeding, to bring them to his Court. Among these exiles were Marshal Münnich and his family. The Duke of Courland was also invited from Jaroslaw to attend the Emperor's Court. The benevolent madman, if madman he were, formed the project of uniting these two great personages in an abiding friendship. It certainly was a very bold project; and it required an

enthusiasm of hopefulness, which the bystanders might well call madness, to suppose that this attempt would be effectual. There are hardly any two personages known in history, whose hostility has been more injurious to each other, than that of these two celebrated men. It may be recollected that their last meeting had been in sledges on the bridge near Kazan, when the Duke of Courland was returning from the little house at Pelem which the Marshal had been so kind as to design for him, with its prison-like form and its narrow windows looking only into a back court. They had then merely saluted one another, the one coming from exile, the other going to it, by lifting their furred caps. It was indeed an enterprise of difficulty to make two such men friends. The first time that they were in the presence of the new Emperor, he beckoned them towards him. "Ah!" he said, and what he said might well appear to be not a very sane saying, "Here are two good friends; they must drink together."

This drinking together had a great meaning in that Age.

The Czar ordered wine to be brought, poured out two glasses with his own hand, and presented one to each of these great personages. At that moment, a certain man of the name of Gudowitzch came into the room, went straight to the Czar, and whispered something to him. It has always been conjectured that Gudowitzch's whisper had reference to the conspiracy, then already in active formation, which was to deprive the Czar of his throne and of his life. He drew back immediately, went out of the room with Gudowitzch, and remained a long time away. As soon as he had left, the Duke and the Marshal eyed one another with a look that spoke of anything but forgiveness and of the possibility of friendship between them.

They then put down the untasted glasses of wine upon the table, and turned their backs upon each other.

When the Emperor re-entered the room, he seemed to have forgotten all about this intended scheme of reconciliation ; and well might he have done so, if that infamous plot, hatched under his

wife's auspices, had been for the first time disclosed to him.*

In the fearful transactions which shortly afterwards took place at the Court of Russia, Münnich was the truest and best counsellor to the wretched Emperor; and, if the Czar had but taken his advice, Catherine II. would

* Als Biron und Münnich sich das Erstemal bey Hofe sahen, rief ihnen Peter III. entgegen: "Ah, da sind ja zwey alte gute Freunde, diese müssen zusammen trinken." Er liess sogleich Wein geben, goss ein und gab selbst jedem ein Glas. In dem Augenblicke trat Gudowitzch ins Zimmer, und sagte dem Kaiser etwas ins Ohr (hinterdrein erfuhr man, dass es ein entfernter Wink gewesen war, den Monarchen auf die künftige Revolution aufmerksam zu machen, den er aber nicht achtete.) Peter III. ging hinaus, und blieb lange weg. Sobald er sich entfernt halte, sahen sich Biron und Münnich mit dem ernstesten Blick der unterdrückten Rache an, und mit einer Bewegung setzten sie die Gläser auf den Tisch, und wendeten sich den Rücken zu. Der Kaiser kam ins Zimmer zurück, hatte aber zum Glück die Aussöhnung vergessen, denn schwerlich würden Biron und Münnich bey der Farce dieser Scene in ihrer Miene den Ausdruck ihres Charakters haben erhalten können.

not have been able to consummate the murder of her husband. It must, however, be said in praise of her sagacity, as well as of her placability, that she did not bear any ill-will to Münnich on account of the advice he had given, and the aid he had tendered, to the Emperor; and that the Field Marshal continued to live at her Court, honoured, trusted, and even employed in the execution of great engineering works.

‘ Vous avez voulu combattre contre moi,’ lui dit cette princesse. ‘ Oui, Madame,’ lui répondit le vieux feld-maréchal; ‘pouvais-je moins faire pour le prince qui m’a délivré de la captivité? Mais c’est à présent mon devoir de combattre pour Votre Majesté, et je le remplirai avec dévouement.’

Perhaps the happiest personage of all, was the old Prince Serbatoff. He had always with him a loving daughter; and the Princess Marie Andréevna de Biron was one of those women who are, or seem to be, more docile to a father than to a husband. It appears to be inconsistent

with their inmost feelings of duty and of religion to contend with one who, however small his gifts may be compared with theirs, is placed by nature in a position of command over them, compelling obedience and even veneration on their part.

The Prince's happiness was greatly increased by having such an admirable son-in-law as Ivan—one who could appreciate all the Prince's courtly sagacity, and whose gradual rise in official rank and power was a constant source of delight to his worldly father-in-law.

This rise, it must be confessed, sometimes puzzled the good Prince, and ultimately induced him, rather against the grain, to enlarge the sphere of his worldly wisdom. Very late in life he was heard to say that, after all, in the case of some extraordinary persons (not for the world in general and not in dealing with most people) it was desirable that they should speak out what they really thought. His Ivan had always done so but it was not a habit to be recklessly and loosely indulged in.

Such was the fate and such were the fortunes of the principal personages in this story—a narrative which has attempted to give some representation of several of the chief events during the eighteenth century in that Empire which has since gone on increasing in greatness; which, in the liberation of its serfs, has given to mankind an extraordinary example of daring humanity; and which, if it advances with equal persistence in social and moral well-being, as material prosperity, is evidently destined to become one of the most beneficent as well as one of the foremost Powers of the world.

THE END.

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